

# The Cenacle



NUMBER 82 | OCTOBER 2012



Ain't it enough  
To live by the ways of the world  
To be part of the picture  
Whatever it's worth?  
Throw your arms 'round each other  
And love one another  
For it's only one life that we've got  
And ain't it enough?

--Old Crow Medicine Show, 2012.

## *Letter to President Barack Obama*

October 20, 2012  
Christian Science Plaza  
Boston, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This begins my sixth letter to you, fourth since you've been the sitting American President. I write to you annually in October, & publish the letter in my literary journal, *The Cenacle*, as well as mailing to you. One of millions you receive, I'm sure, but as much intended to inspire those around me to think for themselves, speak their minds, even put their thoughts to paper. Because it matters. I'm sure you'd agree with this sentiment.

Tonight I am sitting in a very pretty place, Christian Science Plaza in the Back Bay section of Boston. Lovely old buildings, long reflecting pool. I lived near here some years ago as a graduate student in English literature. Boston is one of the most beautiful metropolises in the country, & I'd guess your fondness for it is nearly great as my own, given your years at Harvard, save I think you're probably most partial to Chicago.

Four years ago, sir, you talked of hope & change as you campaigned for President. It was a really ugly time in this country's history, & your bright words rained welcomed down on our drought. We elected you to office, & you've spent four years discovering that most people in Washington, D.C. don't give a fuck for the population as a whole. They are greedy, cynical, & worse, immovable. Lobbyists stick around forever. Congress has no term limits, or quality controls, & perpetual re-election is common.

In short, you've had to bend, stoop, & claw for every gain. It's all been slow, & little has been pretty. The country has limped partway back from the eight year raping it took from Bush & his known & shadowy backers.

I'm not sure why you'd want four more years as President. I know many, myself included, who want you to continue in office as a way to keep Mitt Romney out, & his stygian overlords from returning to power. A Romney presidency would be marked by the slow husking of the social safety net & ever-diminishing efficacy of the Constitution to protect anyone from anything.

You've spent four years trying to find the country jobs. It's simple as that. You've been partly successful, & so the election seems to be a judgment on if enough people think you've been successful enough so far to keep on going. You'll lose some of the impatient vote. Many of the jobless will just stay home.

But I think enough of us will vote for you in the handful of states that matter to keep you in. *Yes, we can?* Yah, I hope.

I'm sure tonight you are traveling somewhere in the country, dog tired, sick of saying the same words over & over for fear of . . . whatever. Probably wishing, a little



bit, that you & Michelle & your daughters were back in Chicago, watching movies & getting take-out. (Their food rivals Boston's.)

But you're nonetheless out there, hustling for every last vote in the last great election of your still-young life. Trying to convince an electorate—too lazy most of the time to see the wasteland for good that DC has become—that *this election matters*. Future Supreme Court nominations are at stake. Laws to help everyone or just a few are at stake. It matters.

My hope, Barack, is that a country you've genuinely tried to help will keep you in office. Will see Romney for the shallow corporate drone he is, suit-&-tied 1-percenter, & unapologetic about it.

My hope is that you are re-elected & do what good you can before DC looks past you to the next guy promising hope & change, & an end to business as usual.

My hope is that you are re-elected & you surprise me a little bit with what time in office you've got left. I'd welcome it.

Good luck. You have my vote again.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raymond Souland, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Raymond Souland, Jr.  
Scriptor Press New England  
Scriptorpress.com

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*But when all is said and done—when you pick up that ballot to vote—you will face the clearest choice of any time in a generation. Over the next few years, big decisions will be made in Washington, on jobs and the economy; taxes and deficits; energy and education; war and peace—decisions that will have a huge impact on our lives and our children's lives for decades to come.*

*On every issue, the choice you face won't be just between two candidates or two parties. It will be a choice between two different paths for America.*

*I won't pretend the path I'm offering is quick or easy. I never have. You didn't elect me to tell you what you wanted to hear. You elected me to tell you the truth. And the truth is, it will take more than a few years for us to solve challenges that have built up over decades. It will require common effort, shared responsibility, and the kind of bold, persistent experimentation that Franklin Roosevelt pursued during the only crisis worse than this one.*

*We, the People, recognize that we have responsibilities as well as rights; that our destinies are bound together; that a freedom which only asks what's in it for me, a freedom without a commitment to others, a freedom without love or charity or duty or patriotism, is unworthy of our founding ideals, and those who died in their defense.*

*As citizens, we understand that America is not about what can be done for us. It's about what can be done by us, together, through the hard and frustrating but necessary work of self-government.*

*So you see, the election four years ago wasn't about me. It was about you. My fellow citizens—you were the change.*

*Only you can make sure that doesn't happen. Only you have the power to move us forward.*

*I recognize that times have changed since I first spoke to this convention. The times have changed—and so have I.*

*But as I stand here tonight, I have never been more hopeful about America. Not because I think I have all the answers. Not because I'm naïve about the magnitude of our challenges. I'm hopeful because of you.*

*And if you share that faith with me—if you share that hope with me—I ask you tonight for your vote.*

*If you reject the notion that this nation's promise is reserved for the few, your voice must be heard in this election.*

*If you reject the notion that our government is forever beholden to the highest bidder, you need to stand up in this election.*

—President Barack Obama,  
Democratic National Convention,  
September 6, 2012



*Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.*

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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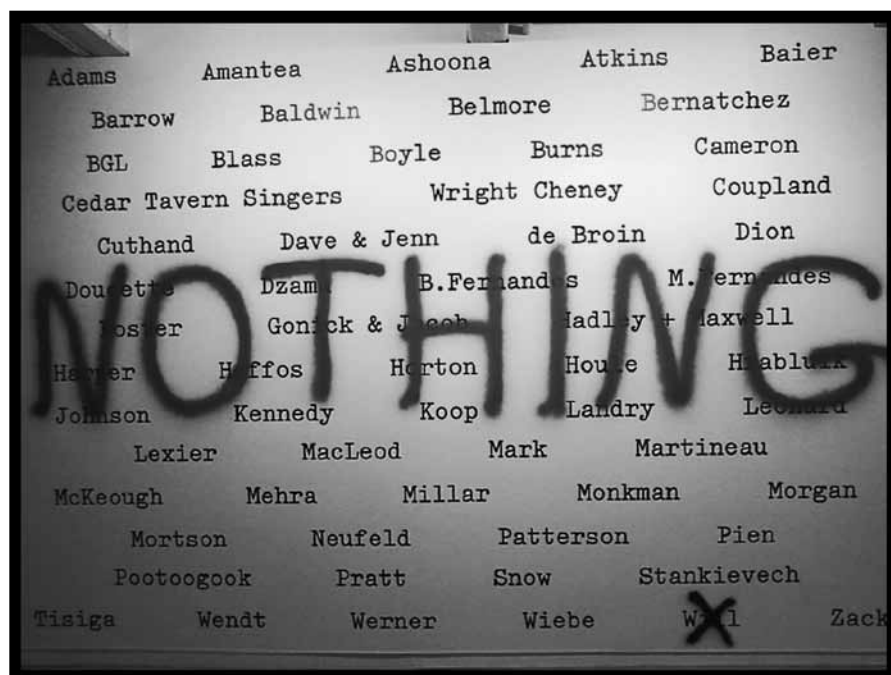
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Thank you to my new company P, & to all those who work there, for hiring me, taking me in, letting me do my technical writer thing, & appreciating what worth I bring to the table . . . it’s been a long time coming . . . thank you, Universe, for letting it happen . . . I will try to prove my gratefulness over time . . .







## Letter to Occupy

The Occupy movement is extraordinary. It has raised local, national, and world consciousness about vast discontent, about failing national and global economic systems, and about the astounding gap in wealth, effectiveness, and life chances between the 1 percent and the 99 percent. This is the first time since the 1930s that social class has been front and center in our society for those paying attention.

The great American movements of the latter half of the twentieth century—civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, women, GLBTQ—took years to get off the ground. Thanks to the unforeseen consequence of globalization and the rocketing rise of social media, massive numbers of people have been able correctly to identify their lack of jobs, housing, affordable education, healthcare, and viable life aspirations with those of millions—no, billions!—of fellow global citizens. It did not take years to get all this going. It took days. In circumstances as diverse as those in Spain, Greece, Chile, Tunisia, Egypt, Wisconsin, Israel, and Quebec, the colossal outpouring of anger—shaped by extreme passion and nonviolence—took away the breath of billions of participants and observers, and caused those in charge of the status quo to tremble mightily.

The Occupy action itself was brilliant. Its explicit claim was that public spaces belong as much to aroused, angry citizens as they do to Sunday strollers and people taking their workday lunch breaks. Tent cities with health centers, religious spaces, media desks, and even libraries, could not, after their first few days, be ignored by mainstream media. A twenty-four-hour presence complete with colorful posters, sheltering of the homeless, rolling discussions about everything, and call-and-response nightly General Assemblies was a wonder to behold.

Of course it did not all go smoothly. Occupy evolved quickly as a super democratic and quasi-anarchic movement. It had no central leadership or platform or plan. Each city's Occupy grew in its own way. Waves were made, splashes were felt, and cries were heard.

Occupy began last October. As winter approached, ideas were abundant for how to sustain the encampments, but before plans could be carried out, police forces, in what looked like a nationally coordinated maneuver, uprooted just about all the Occupy sites.

Stage One of Occupy, which grew like Topsy and commanded extensive attention, was over. Occupiers moved indoors. Planning continued. Actions like housing the homeless and challenging mega-banks sprouted up in city after city. But the sporadic nature of the actions and the decentralization of it all diluted the original passion and the initial message. And—crucially—it shrunk the public awareness that is the oxygen of a movement like Occupy.

Occupy is not over, but Stage Two has not yet come together. I will now, audaciously, suggest a Stage Two that I am convinced would rock the world.

\* \* \*

## Where the Money Is

Any social movement that succeeds has to be based on an accurate analysis of conditions of discontent, and of possible ways of overcoming them. Occupy, as I see it, draws anger from two sources. One source is personal situations. Many of the people behind Occupy in this country—and in the corresponding movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Greece, and Spain—were responding at least in part to having found no work commensurate with their higher educational accomplishments. Lack of work and crushing debts (especially in the United States which is unparalleled in sticking students with gigantic education loans) are a mighty combination.

The space between those personal discontents and awareness of ghastly inequities in the larger system was as thin as tissue paper. The unbridled opportunism and cynicism of just about all parts of the finance industry—the ruthless and cunning manipulation of naïve home buyers' dreams; the masterly posting of banking personnel in key government positions—became suddenly apparent to large numbers of people. Their anger spread like wildfire, and Occupy erupted from the white-hot outrage and discontent.

It became clearer than ever that there is something mightily wrong with a society that spends hundreds of billions of dollars bailing out banks and automobile companies but claims to have too little money for healthcare (the United States is the only advanced country in the world that lets substantial numbers of health dollars go to insurance companies rather than health and has no national healthcare system at all), education (the United States is way down globally in measures of success in education), reversing climate change (short-sighted corporations making money off pollution succeed in making this most urgent impending environmental catastrophe into a mockery), housing (the disaster of sub-prime mortgages has thrown millions out of their homes with nowhere else to go), and more.

Indeed, a recent report suggests that upward mobility, also known as the American Dream—the chance to move forward in education, income, status, and lifestyle—is now lower in the United States than in just about any other industrialized country.

The people who are responsible for this mess—corporations and politicians—are not stupid or evil. Rather, they are acting the way their positions in society demand that they act. They are sucked into huge machines demanding that profit and power—not decency and compassion—rule, have always ruled, and shall rule until the end of time. They probably mean well, but their training is so severe and successful that it is very hard for them to pull away from it and see the world anew. And to discover how they could save us all—including themselves—from our impending devastation.

Those masters of finance, industry, and politics can find their way beyond the profit and power nexus, but this is among the greatest challenges facing those who seek a just society. The 1 percent have staked their all at maintaining the social order in its current form, or on a reactionary earlier form where they would have even more money and power than they do now. There is no greater challenge on earth than figuring out how to end the dominance of that 1 percent. They need some jolts, gigantic bolts from the blue, in order to be motivated to get off the money-and-power dime. Some of them understand this and will go with change. Others will fight it tooth and nail. The challenge is there either to persuade those others to move from greed thinking and values to social, planetary thinking and values, or to wrest their power and wealth from them nonviolently. There is no greater challenge facing those who

envision liberating, universal change, and who commit themselves to working for it.

The first step is to recognize the claim that there is not enough money for housing, education, healthcare, and climate change reversal is simply a *lie*, one of the *greatest* deceptions of all time. It is a fraud motivated by short-sightedness and assumptions made by mainstream economists rather than by stupidity or evil.

The 2008 crisis and its aftermath have led even some mainstream economists to question their assumptions that a market system works best when it is unconstrained and makes lots of money for investors. Alan Greenspan, who headed the Federal Reserve for almost twenty years, and whose policies are heavily responsible for our economic catastrophe, has admitted that he had put too much faith in assumptions that the market system works best with few controls. If the economic profession is as shaken as it seems to be, this is surely the time to work with dazed, smart economists, as well as those who knew the limits of free market thinking all along, to shift the economy toward human and planetary well-being and sustainable economies as alternative visions. These goals, given public airing, would surely satisfy everyone who decided to look at the larger survival picture rather than just the small-bore profit one.

There is plenty of money right now for superb healthcare, outstanding education, housing for everyone, healthy food, infrastructure repair, and reversing global warming. There is abundant money to meet all these needs. The claim that there is not enough money is a diversion, a tall tale, a ruse meant to keep the big bucks in the hands and pockets of the 1 percent, rather than spreading it around for the benefit of all. The case for cutting back on government supports—for just about everything but war—is, in short, one big lie.

It just happens that the great piles of money needed for meeting real human needs are stored in places that some clever people have convinced most of us are sacrosanct: tax loopholes, tax breaks for the 1 percent, and the military budget. It seems to me that Stage Two of Occupy has got to reveal to everyone that the money is there, and to demand that it be freed for saving us all and our planet. Here's how to do it: through one universal political movement, crossing all boundaries, and divided into three parts.

### 1. End Tax Loopholes

Demand that citizen overseers, working with attorneys general and tax officials, and elected in contests not financed by the 1 percent, have powers of inquiry and enforcement to plug all loopholes that allow the 1 percent to pay less than their fair share of taxes.

Nobody can spend hundreds of millions of dollars, let alone billions. Or needs to try. Nobody truly earns those big bucks anyway. They gain wealth by inheriting a starter fortune upon which to build (think Romney here), and/or they make it by underpaying workers and outsourcing much of what would allow the United States to maintain a vibrant economy, and/or they make it by stripping workers of organizing rights and healthcare benefits and pensions, and/or they make it by hiring extremely clever if unprincipled lawyers who devise ways for them to pay little or no taxes, and/or they make it by promoting products that are unhealthy and even dangerous, and/or they make it by creating grotesque conditions for workers in third world countries who work at starvation wages at best, and/or they make it by buying politicians who rig laws in their favor in return for hefty financing of political campaigns. And so on.

I emphasize that the people who make oceans of money and dodge taxes should not be hated or scorned. Our problem is not with them but with the structures that permit and even



encourage them to act ruthlessly in order to achieve the two prime goals of profit and power, the goals that all but drown alternative goals of sustainability, planet preservation, and decency and compassion for all.

## 2. Increase Tax Rates on the Rich

Demand a graduated income tax, returning in the United States to taxation levels of the Eisenhower era, which taxed the super rich beyond a certain point at levels up to 90 percent. It is a myth that low taxes on the rich stimulate the economy. They don't. The United States economy did far better when taxes on the very rich were high than it does now that taxes on them are low.<sup>1</sup>

The culture of the 1 percent obsesses over making ever more money and, most likely, appearing in the *Fortune Magazine* list of the 500 richest Americans. Money becomes a narcotic, an obsession that the rich can no more control than can any other addict manage their intake of alcohol or drugs. Insisting on ever more wealth is not an economic triumph; it is a tragic mania. The 1 percent have to insulate themselves from the feelings and realities of most of the 99 percent and therefore have really *to cut off their own humanity* in order to meet the rigorous demands of an economic system that has spun out of control.

## 3. Reduce Military Budgets Drastically

Although humans have suffered war for about 10,000 years, we are at a point in history where there are far better ways of resolving conflicts. Fully respecting the training, hopes, and sacrifices of the men and women of the military, I think they are especially well positioned to see that war is not the best way to make money for investors or to change whatever conditions wars are intended to change. The United States is now the premier war-making country in the world, *and its military budget is greater than those of all other countries combined*. The United States also sells tens of billions of dollars worth of war materiel to countries—many of them like Saudi Arabia on the anti-human rights far right. Billions of taxpayer money—*our money*—finance arms fairs that promote those weapons sales.

Heads of state classically try to show their masculinity by leading nations into war. They often find war a useful and necessary payback to war contractors (also called defense contractors) who help finance their election campaigns. They also use war as a way of distracting their populations' attention from their real problems by diverting anger at the institutions and injustices of their own society toward a manufactured enemy instead.

As war winds down, it will still be necessary for nations to maintain small militaries capable of defense. Offensive war should be defined by the International Court of Justice as a crime against humanity, and punished by massive economic boycotts and ending of diplomatic relations with any state that initiates a war.

American wars, in particular following the Second World War, have ended in nothing useful to anyone. The division of Korea remains a blight for everyone concerned. The war in Vietnam, spilling over into Cambodia and Laos, killed millions and gained nothing of

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of how returning to earlier tax rates would make a gigantic difference in our society's ability to solve problems, see "Eisenhower Era Income Tax Rates on the Upper 10 percent of Families Would Immediately Erase the Federal Deficit" ([http://tiny.cc/fellman\\_cenacle82](http://tiny.cc/fellman_cenacle82)).

consequence for the United States or any southeast Asian country. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have increased wealth for oil barons and war contractors but little else. Millions have died to keep the war machine going. Whether it ever was necessary, war is no longer so now.

In the last hundred years or so, a major alternative to war as a way to end conflicts has emerged and has grown considerably: nonviolent civil disobedience. Gandhi and King were the best-known teachers of it, and there are now countless successes of civil disobedience. Back in 1905, the governments of Sweden and Norway were preparing to go to war. Troops were massed at the border between the two countries. Norwegians and Swedes in large numbers insisted there be no war. The governments acceded to that demand.

In just the last year, huge numbers of people in Tunisia and Egypt overthrew despised dictators nonviolently. Millions of students in Chile and Quebec brought those countries' higher education systems to a standstill with nonviolent calls for making high quality university education available to everyone who wants it. The effectiveness of Occupy itself has been tied very closely to its nonviolent behaviors. On those occasions when violence was employed, nothing good came of it. This is the time in history to move from violence to nonviolence. Much is known by now about how to do this. The ideas and the training are there for the asking.

Except for the very few countries without a military, this is the time to campaign for reducing military budgets by half over a three-year period, and then by half of what remains over the following three-year period. The money gained from these campaigns should be used for meeting real human needs for jobs, education, housing, healthcare, and for reversing climate change to the extent that that is possible. There is enough money for all of this. It is in raising taxes on the 1 percent, ending tax loopholes for all corporations and individuals, and drastically reducing military budgets.

### **Campaign Financing and Democracy**

There should be no private money in any elections. Governments should allocate the same amount of money to everyone running for office. Corporations, unions, and private wealthy persons should be forbidden to contribute even a dollar to political campaigns.

One of the oddest judicial decisions of our time or any other is the bizarre notion that money is a form of free speech. It is said that "money talks," but it really doesn't. The person with the money does the talking, and the money short circuits persuasion, which is the main technique for using free speech in politics.

The ordinary person who gives 50 dollars to a politician's campaign is not equal to the very rich person who puts in ten million dollars. *Money is not speech*. Rather, it is a form of bribe, pressure, intimidation, coercion, seduction. It is a way for very rich people—those in the 1 percent—actually to buy politicians who are then obligated to make political decisions in favor of those who paid them to get into office. In a democracy, words are free speech. Money is a tool for manipulating. *Money is not free speech*; it corrupts free speech.

\* \* \*



## To Vote or Not to Vote in 2012

Barack Obama may be a good campaigner, but he has disappointed so many of his 2008 enthusiasts that countless of them are most likely to decide, in anger or seeming indifference, not to vote in 2012, or at least not to urge others to vote for him. Many of you, whose employment or lack of it has been hit so hard by the great recession, are surely among those who will condemn the entire American two-party system as hopelessly corrupt in its genuflecting endlessly to the 1 percent and bowing to their ultimatums.

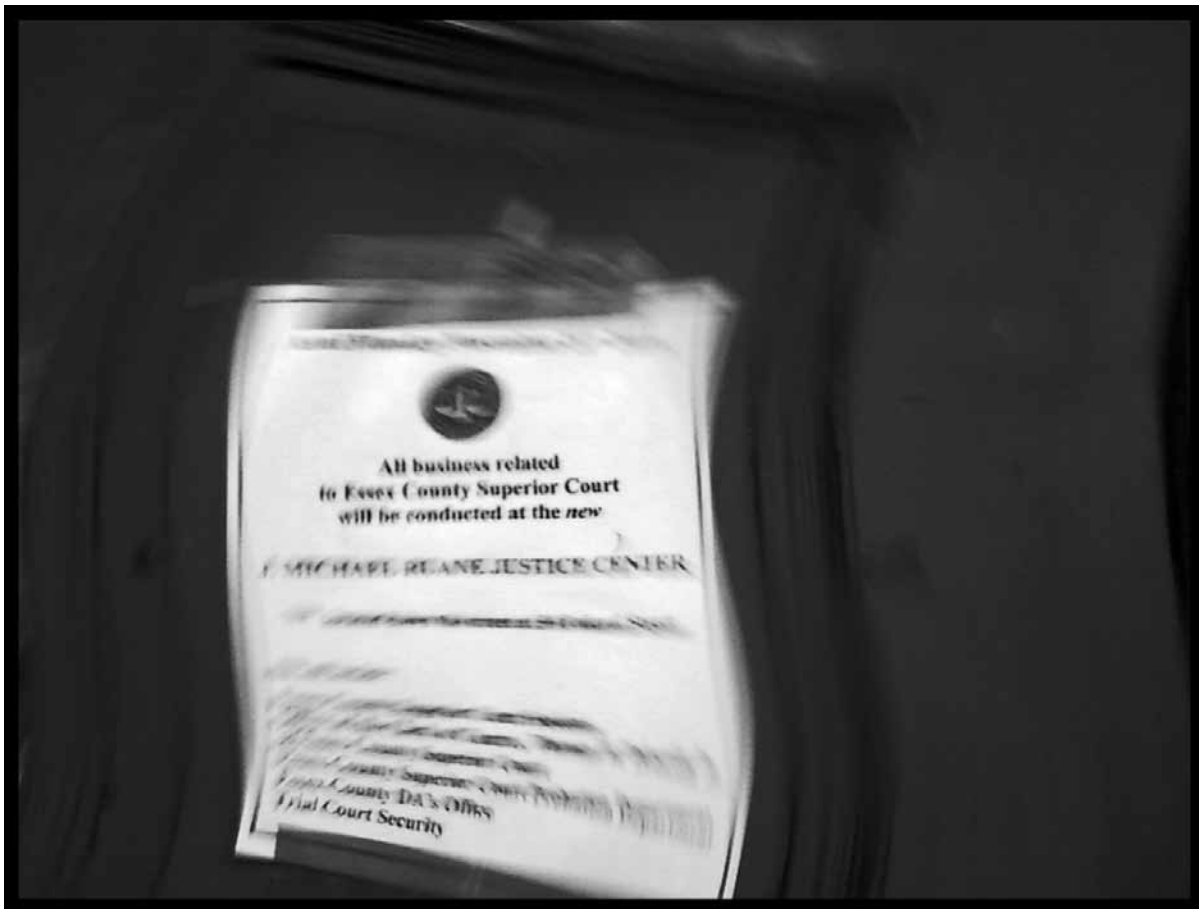
Well, as corrupt and disappointing as our political system is, it is simply not true that there are no differences between the two major parties. My late brother used to say that one has to vote Democratic if for no other reason than that Democratic presidents nominate far better, fairer, more decent, and compassionate judges than Republican presidents do. Consider that George W. Bush was declared president by a 5-4 Republican Supreme Court majority whose written decision is considered by countless lawyers, including some on the right, to be the worst Supreme Court decision they have ever read. Consider that that same 5-4 majority gave our electoral system to the 1 percent in the *Citizens United* decision, defining money as a form of free speech, and asking for no accountability whatsoever from rich donors to campaigns.

But it potentially will get worse than that. Those of you considering not voting in the 2012 presidential election, consider this: Obama or Romney, whoever is elected, will likely nominate one or more members to the Supreme Court. If Romney nominates, then the resulting Supreme Court will almost certainly overturn *Roe v. Wade*. When women lose the right of choice, when they return to coat hanger abortions and back-alley butcher abortionists, when those women are degraded and numbers of them die, how are you going to tell your friends—and yourself—that it did not make any difference who became president?

When the Supreme Court validates overturning rights to free speech, and separation of religion and state, and makes legal the further brutalization of workers and the unemployed; when the Supreme Court upholds the travesties of justice fueled by a privatized prison service in whose interest it is to keep prisons filled, and spend as little as possible maintaining them; when the Supreme Court misses no opportunity to turn the nation over completely to the corporations and billionaires to live obscenely high off the hog while tens of millions of their fellow citizens live lives of quiet desperation—then tell me it did not make any difference who became president in 2012.

Romney promises, if elected, to overturn our new healthcare system, which is far better than what preceded it, on his first day in office. He promises to let the Keystone pipeline go forth that will, according to environmentalists, do untold damage to water systems and land from North Dakota to the Gulf. In thrall to the most reactionary elements of the Republican Party, which have taken over his rhetoric and perhaps his mind as well, he will likely move to make contraception illegal and to overturn laws allowing gays to marry. If he is elected, because you refused to vote for Obama, who would do none of those things just listed—then tell me it did not make any difference who became president in 2012.

If Obama is re-elected, it will be the task of all people seeking to end the abuses of our current system at last to hold his feet to the fire. Demands to fix our society and fix our planet will be best served by freeing up hundreds of billions of dollars wasted on military expenditures, including maintaining around a thousand American military bases around the world, and preparing for endless wars rather than learning how to live in peace. And those



demands will best be met by denying corporations and the very wealthy in that 1 percent the opportunity to take advantage of tax dodges and refuse to pay taxes they are supposed to pay.

### **The 1 Percent Is Not Homogeneous**

The 99 percent/1 percent formulation promoted by Occupy is brilliant. Not since the 1930s, when unions were strong and there were serious political parties challenging “free market” thinking, has social class—the study of the haves and whys of the haves and the have-nots—been on the front burner in American society. But now it is, and the 99/1 vocabulary has become part of common discourse.

As our society moves ahead in confronting its monumental problems, though, it is useful to move past stark binaries like 99 percent *versus* 1 percent. That formulation, implicit or explicit in much of what Occupy has analyzed so far, unfortunately sets the stage for the 1 percent—through control of police forces, media, education, and politics—to find ways to intimidate and subvert Occupy. It also assumes, incorrectly, that everyone in the 1 percent thinks and acts just like everyone else in the 1 percent. That is not true.

There are numbers of millionaires and billionaires who are not only sympathetic to Occupy, but who call for higher taxes on themselves and their fellow 1 percent’ers. These more visionary and understanding members of the 1 percent—Warren Buffett is the best known of them—know about global warming; they know about intolerable greed and corruption; they know no one is entitled to endless billions; and they know about the outrages and injustices of the system of which they are a part.

### **Actions for Major Change**

The time is ripe for a bold move to capture the imaginations of the 99 percent and of those members of the 1 percent already leaning in that direction. It will be necessary to persuade as many as possible of the 1 percent that working on everyone’s behalf is more in their interest than is the profit-power nexus that they have been taught trumps everything else on earth. We could see as a goal an eventual combining of the 99 percent and the 1 percent to make a society where 100 percent agree to bend their talents and hearts to building a world of justice, sustainability, and survival of our planet itself.

Sure, it sounds like a pipe dream. So was the end of cannibalism. So was the end of human sacrifice. So was the end of slavery. So was religious freedom. So was free speech. So was the civil rights movement. So was the anti-Vietnam War movement. So was the women’s movement. So was the LGBTQ movement.

The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer wrote, “All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.” And so it will be with the world’s first global political movement, to return the wealth of a society to all of its people to be used for the benefit of everyone. That idea was ridiculed for at least a century and a half. Now we are in Schopenhauer’s stage two, when the idea is violently opposed. We can and must hold on long enough for the idea to become accepted as self-evident. That will require a huge amount of work. Here is how it can be done:

1. *Redesign Occupy as a global (not national) movement.* Nearly all countries are structured with a 1 percent that maintains more than its fair share of wealth by avoiding paying at full tax rates and taking advantage of tax loopholes. Most nation-states spend far more on defense than is in any conceivable way necessary. Helping the super-rich to part with funds they do not need joins with lowering military spending to create funds needed to meet everyone's real human needs.
2. *Embrace nonviolent civil disobedience as the main method of working for social change.* Local chapters of the global movement could engage in comprehensive trainings in the theory and numerous techniques of nonviolent civil disobedience. Countless nonviolence successes would be studied carefully as would failures. Change would proceed with respect for everyone, including opponents.
3. *Oppose cruel structures, not people.* It was tempting in the 1960s, as at most times in history, to identify an "enemy" and demonize it. This practice is so familiar that it is all but automatic for countless activists and bystanders alike, on the left as well as on the right. The problems we face are in the *structures* that train people to behave cruelly far more than in the people themselves, for if the people who abuse are replaced in structures that remain the same, the abuse will be repeated. It is time to replace hierarchical structures, and their power wielded from the top down, with horizontal structures, where people learn to identify and solve problems *together*. This is what some people call the difference between *power over* and *power with*.
4. *Design a slogan that will crystallize the movement and its vision.* "Our planet, ourselves" might be one possibility. "Sustain our planet, sustain our lives" is another. "Wealth belongs to all." "Compassion and joy trump profit and power." "Share power, save planet." "We are all in this together." The possibilities are endless.
5. *Work for change cooperatively.* Fighting within Occupy and other change groups reflects old patterns of assuming that one has to "win" rather than that one has to solve problems in community. For some months, countless Occupy encampments explored democratic decision-making and did it with a clear sense of community. Much of that fell apart eventually. Out of control anger, insistence on having one's way, reluctance to look inward to learn what interferes with acting calmly and effectively, and ties to this generation's versions of "political correctness," have all interfered with the further development of Occupy.

It is hard to take all this into account. But positive social change does not come from only wishing for it or spending just a few months on it. There is no greater task for us than figuring out how to survive the political and environmental crises of this era. This is infinitely more challenging than making money and living comfortably. As successful change comes, it will be discovered that working with others for genuine human dignity and liberation and environmental sustainability is infinitely more rewarding, too.

July 27, 2012

\* \* \* \* \*

**Anti-anthropomorphism**

Homemade backyard yoga  
under mid-morning hot June sun—  
first the cormorant stretching its wings  
back and up to our yellow star,  
sharp-angled shadow of the wings  
cutting diagonally against cellar wall.  
Next squatting close to the earth  
a placid, unflinching brown toad  
purveyor of grasstop and ledge  
connected kinetically to the dirt's vibrations,  
a consciousness at ease with stillness or hop.  
Now on the back, legs and arms small dents in the sky—  
could be a sunning otter or hypnotized mink.  
And I don't see the animals mimicking us,  
and can't help but think that we can't help but think,  
even when thinking isn't what's needed.  
What you appear to be about is a grateful loss of identity—  
exiting the skin of this one way of being  
to take on new lifelines and get taken away,  
float to the edge to come back charged.

\* \* \*

**Infusion**

In the final dream before awakening  
the word “mystery”  
was scrawled across her forehead—  
the font slant and shadowy  
the letters two inches high  
the medium a thin black ink  
protective and cool to the touch.  
And as she slowly rose from the pillow  
a wave of disorientation struck  
as the letters began to dissolve  
slide across her eyes over her cheekbones  
into sudden half-open mouth  
yielding a pleasant warmth in throat and belly  
as the curative elixir  
entered the bloodstream  
and her senses unspooled  
to the light growing at the window  
the scent of warm flesh in the morning  
the sound of the dog exhaling—  
and the need to understand none of it.

\* \* \*

## Trajectory

Reading old letters is like hitting an on-switch.  
Sparks fly from a far, fierce distance,  
fading red lines chart ecstasy, sulfur, bedrock.  
And you're upended by the histories of new beginnings,  
undone by the stars and hearts in the margins.  
Unnerved by the faith and the fall-out,  
broken open and revamped by words.  
It's a movie being played backward  
a shiver riding an odyssey  
a jumble and branding of years and crossings.  
It's the trail and trial of the most complete information  
you had available at the moment.  
You know the handwriting see the dates channel the places  
hold the artifact squarely before you—  
but how spectral this self  
how potent yet unreal the shocks  
that informed your ways then  
strengthen your grasp now  
as you gather these past lives  
and welcome them aboard,  
run together now as one good ghost  
through a curved and back-lit country.

\* \* \*



### **In A Native Mood**

Facing East in prayer  
 big sun rising behind the hills  
 small birds chirping salute—  
 do not wonder about the source  
 do not wonder about the song  
 spilling out of your throat  
 bird throat sun throat  
 some kind of gratitude  
 moving you up taking you down  
 down to the purity of light at dawn  
 as a spruce self-combusts  
 its rings fly open  
 sparks in the air  
 diamonds on the moss  
 peace in the core of all beating hearts  
 that pull in so much pour out so hard  
 energy belonging to no one and all.  
 And now it has passed  
 how has it mattered  
 where has it gone  
 is the tree still smoking  
 bird flying on  
 sun taking note—  
 and if it comes facing East  
 will it come dying West  
 will it come more and more as days crack and glow  
 will it come even now as prayer is ascending  
 it will come  
 it will come  
 it will come.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Old Man with a Broken Walking Stick

[New Fiction]

It was where the Dark Forest runs out of breath, not far from Xi Shuang Ban Na, and the Lan Cang River, pretending to be a thief, steals much of daylight's silver. Here one morning, an elderly man with a broken walking stick came out of the forest and went along the river gathering its coin. He wore a cap for the weather and a jacket Time had touched roughly. And he limped.

The limp was a serious limp, almost twisting the man's frame. His left foot had a dragging stutter to it and his makeshift boot was greatly worn. The man looked as if he would topple easily. And need or want moved in the air about him.

The single walking stick at his left side was crude and bound in places, where it had been broken, with tightly coiled wire. Ning Li the blacksmith, from his doorway, saw him first, noticed how he leaned to one side. "Hui," he called, and his wife came to the door. "We will have another for breakfast," he said. Her apron was gathered in her hands and she looked at the stranger and said, "I am sure we will." As she nodded, she enjoyed the sun shining on the face of the river.

Ning Li, a big man with red suspenders and heavy brown pants, stood and hailed the other man. "Could you stand for tea and a biscuit, sir? We do not have much but we can ease some of your hunger. Eggs would be another matter." Again Ning Li noted how the man leaned almost to the point of falling. Then he saw the man's kindly face, the clear blue eyes, and the way he held his chin. And his hands! His hands were delicate and smooth and did not look as if they belonged with the walking stick or had used the walking stick for a long time.

"You are too kind, sir," the man with the walking stick said. A slight smile wore on his face. "We are in luck, for I have two eggs here I found last evening in the forest, and no place to cook them." From a pocket of the worn jacket he brought out two brown eggs that could be yet idling in a nest. "If the lady of the house would oblige, she may do as she wishes with them." He held out the two brown eggs and Ning Li called his wife. "Hui, we'll have biscuits dipped in eggs today, just the way you like them."

Then Ning Li pointed to a chair and said, "Rest easy while the biscuits get dipped and fried. We'll have our tea here where the sun comes first. If I were a carpenter I would fix that walking stick for you, but my iron would be too heavy for you." Then Ning Li said, "By what name are you called, sir?"

"They call me Stick. They have called me Stick for a long time, for so long I know no other name. So Stick I will be. It is not uncomfortable for me."

They ate their biscuits with a small mound of butter and sweet syrup. And a second cup of tea.

"Do you have far to go?" Ning Li said, as he finished his tea. "We could put some lunch in a bag for you."

"Not far," Stick said, "not far at all."

When the tea was gone Stick said thank you and went on his way.

Just before noon, still where the forest runs out of breath and the river steals daylight, Stick was hailed by another man in his front yard. The man had seen the man's serious limp in the heat of the sun. "Stranger, would a bit of shade and a small bite of food aid you on your journey? We do not have much, but we will share. I am here with my two daughters. Today is a day without meat for us. We have a few pennies left from rice we bought."

"Such a lucky day it is," Stick said. "Last night in the forest I came upon a deer who had recently impaled himself. I came away with some venison." From deep in his jacket pocket he drew out a small parcel wrapped in dark paper. "However your daughters choose to cook it, let it be done." The daughters danced away with the venison. Soon the aroma climbed on the air in the middle of the day. And there was a sauce to go with bread and the four of them dipped bread and ate the venison.

"My name is Feng Tu and I am a music teacher," Feng Tu said, his big teeth showing as he talked. "If I could work with wood, I would make you a new walking stick to assist you in your journey. But I have no knowledge of wood. Nor what its grain is or where its strength lies, except here." And with that he drew a violin up from below the table and played songs for Stick and his daughters. After a while, Stick said, "I must be going. But I do not have far to travel." He left with his *thank you* as soft as music on the air.

Stick was not far away by the close of evening. A young boy came up to him and said, "My mother saw you coming for a long time from her window. We do not have much, but you are welcome to eat at our table. We have some rice soup. It is thin soup, but it will be warm."

"Young man," Stick said, "tell your mother we are in luck. Just last evening, in the middle of the Dark Forest, where there was a small patch of late sunlight, I found two potatoes, two beets and two carrots." He dug deep into his jacket pocket and brought out the vegetables. "Tell your good mother to thicken the soup with these."

The boy nodded with delight and ran off to give the vegetables to his mother. He soon came back and said, "She thanks you a great deal. If my father were here he could fix your walking stick for you, but he is away in the Great War that moves around the world. We hope he comes back soon. He is a carpenter and could fix your walking stick easily."

At dusk they ate the newly thickened rice soup with the potatoes and the beets and the carrots cut up in it. The soup was delicious and the boy soon fell asleep on a bench in front of his house while the mother cleaned the dishes. Stick said goodbye. "I have to keep moving. You have a fine boy. I hope your husband gets back soon. War is a great separator, but often not the final one."

His way took him along a stone wall for a few miles, the sun sinking all the while.

The river had nearly given up all of its daylight when Stick was walking past an old house sitting back from the road like a deep shadow. Not one window had a light in it, nor was there any smoke coming from the chimney. A voice hailed him from the darkness in front of the house. "If you have no place to sleep, sir, we could put you up, but you must be able to do with the darkness and the cold. We do not have any light or any kindling to start a fire or any matches for that matter. I am afraid that my children will not be able to do their reading this night and they might also catch cold. The edge of the moon says it is going to be cold."

"You are most kind, sir," Stick said, "but fear not. Last evening in the forest I found some flint and stone in an old pouch on a tree stump. We can start a fire with them."

"All well and good," the man in the darkness said, "but we still have no kindling to get the big logs burning."

"Ah, but we do," Stick said, as he slammed his broken walking stick over a large stone in the wall and splintered it for kindling. The sound crackled so harshly in the night it frightened the man.

"But how will you walk on the morrow?" the man said.

Stick had no hesitation. "You will make me a walking stick tonight," he replied.

"I have been unable to work for a long time," the man said. But all night he worked hard on several pieces of wood he found behind his house, knowing that before this stranger came he would not have even looked for such wood. Light came from a good fire and warmth filled the house and the children were asleep after reading their lessons. In the morning the man handed Stick a shiny new walking stick that caught the early morning sun all along its shaft. The walking stick was smooth with a lacquer finish on it and a pad on the top where it fit under Stick's arm.

That sun was barely up over the horizon when Stick walked away in the early rays of sunlight. Down past the fields he went, past the stone walls, to where the river again was catching up all the daylight it could grasp. Once, with his new walking stick, he waved back at the man.

Later that evening all the people gathered in the village and were talking about the man with the broken walking stick.

"I am glad that we were able to feed him," Ning Li said, his thumbs hooked on his red suspenders. "We gave him breakfast, a royal breakfast, a meal to begin the day with." He paused, hooking his suspenders a little higher. "As my mother used to say, 'A meal to touch the backbone.'"

"And we gave the poor man his lunch," Feng Tu said, "with venison and thick gravy. A meal also fit for a king." He smiled proudly, his large teeth showing. "We even played music for him to soothe his vagrant soul. If there were a place for that poor man to live, this would be it. We all did so much for him. All taking our turn with a stranger." Those around him nodded in agreement.

The boy's mother, not to be outdone, not wanting to be left out of a share of goodness, took her turn. "A most splendid and thick soup we gave the man. Thick as any soup can be, heavy with good rice and potatoes and beets, and new carrots to give solid offerings. A treat for any beggar on his rounds. The kind that sticks to one's ribs." It was a matter of punctuation when she added, "And he ate a goodly share of it."

The others nodded in agreement again, seemingly all of one mind.

They were very satisfied with themselves, puffed and self-indulgent, but a voice from the edge of light, the man from the darkness, said, "Do any of you know what he gave to us? Why do we continually wrap ourselves up in our own gifts? Why do we tie up our own ribbons in such a manner?"

"Well," the boy's mother said, "what did you do for him? It was near dark when he left my house."

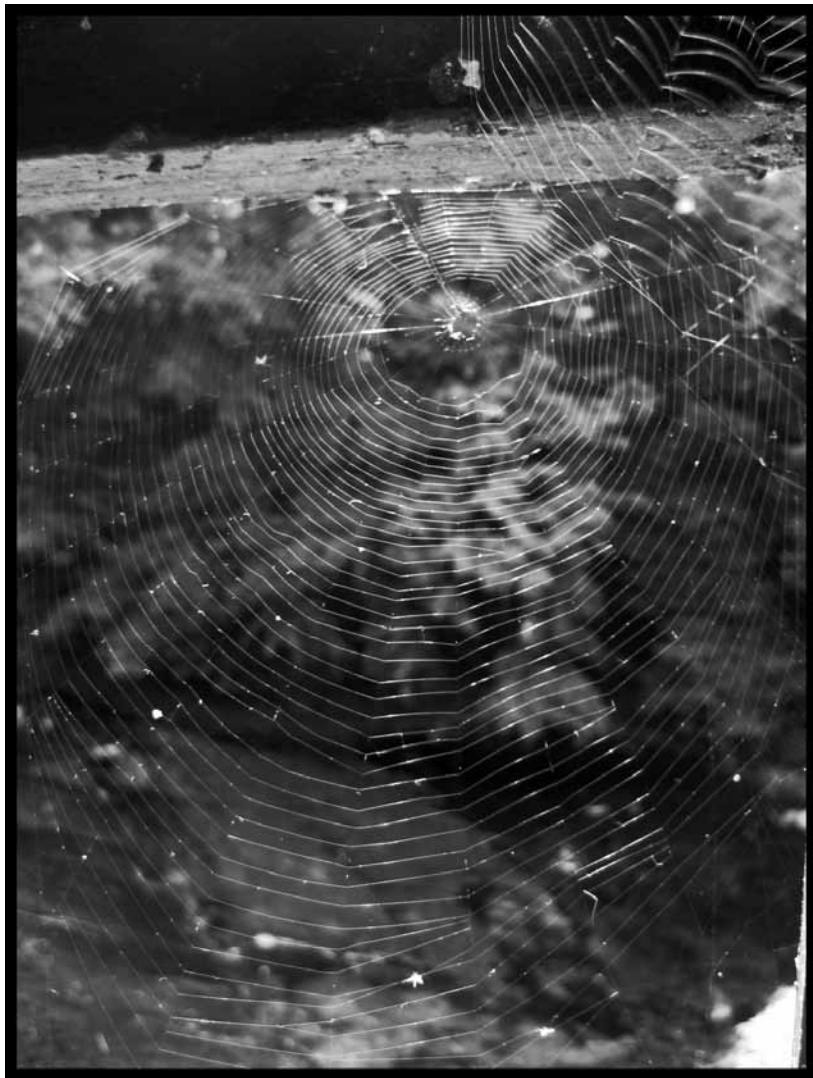
"What fools we are," the man answered. "It's not what we did for him. It's what he did for us. He took care of us. Me, a useless man for years, I made a walking stick for him. I haven't

worked like that in a long time and I guess we all know that.” For a moment he hung his head. “That’s one of the reasons he came here. The man needed a walking stick to get on with. And he saw to it that I made it for him. We did not really do for him. He did for us, but we are afraid to say it.”

The next morning, on the other side of the Lan Cang River, where the mountain suddenly stands tall and the field stops its long run, the man with a broken walking stick came limping out of the forest, ready to lean on some more people.

Another elderly man, enjoying early sunlight, hailed him from his front door.

\* \* \* \* \*



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



## Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*"Please accept this ragged purse  
of high notes."*

*The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.*

### Notes on Occupy

This year's election, every major election in fact, & every minor one really, is about what laws are going to be discussed and voted upon by whom in the halls of power. Laws that affect each one of us, no matter how much we may try to turn away and ignore it all. It's about the fact that the US and its economic and military might shadows the world. And yet, despite this, we each have a legal say in this situation.

We ended slavery. We got women the right to vote. These never should have *had* to be victories. But they were. We won the civil rights debate. We are slowly winning GLBT rights & overturning laws against marijuana & psychedelics. Nobody is going to hand us these victories. Mass opposition didn't stop the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We didn't have enough representation in DC. But we changed the numbers, & war with Iran has not occurred.

Ideally, we would not be concerned with these things. We would be busy building a paradise from the generous bounty this planet offers all life. But we are brutish conscious animals, as inclined to violence as to empathy.

Our time is finite on this planet, & most often politics is an ugly ugly thing, mostly brings out the worst in people. Many people in the Occupy movement have not & will not involve themselves in electoral politics, call it all a sham, & all political parties alike. Vote Green, they say, or turn away entirely.

I believe this attitude to be the problem with Occupy now. There was such a great promise last fall but no follow-through, no ideas to drive the societal narrative beyond protest. Nobody wanted to say what Occupy was about. Everyone wanted it to be about everything, so that nobody was excluded. So it became about nothing. People got bored and left, joined other movements, filled their time with other things. Now, in an election year, with a chance to summon millions into a broken election system to overwhelm it with new blood, nothing happens. Occupy celebrates its anniversary by trying (& essentially failing) to occupy again. It's frustrating as hell to see it all happen, and so much not happen.

I don't know that Occupy has time left to still matter. I do know the clock is ticking.

Maybe its purpose was to turn attention to the economic disaster happening in this country, and then dissipate. I don't know. I do know that the same bastards are in office now as last fall, and the only chance we have to follow through on the Occupy promise is to swarm the election with new voters, empowered to believe that they can make a change, and that change can be good as well as bad.

This world is suffering mightily in so many ways, as perhaps always. Occupy was a sudden shock of light. That light is fading. Voting is not in itself an answer, but it sure as hell beats just sitting still, ignoring the obvious, and letting the darkness move in without a fight. The bastards hope more people stay home, for whatever reason. They don't care why, just that many do. One less vote they have to suppress.

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**“Ansel Adams: At Water’s Edge” Exhibition**  
**Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts**  
**June 9, 2012 to October 8, 2012**

*“Ice & Water Reflections, River, Yosemite Valley” (about 1942)*

A river or pond, half frozen, &  
 in the frozen swathes a blurred image,  
 a to-somewhere-else, which, as  
 the morning warms, disappears, leaving  
 only reflection of trees & skies.



\*\*\*\*\*



*“Submerged Trees, Slide Lake, Teton Area” (about 1965)*

An area of the One Woods, a valley,  
 its lake, a submerged land,  
 & one would think to look, to hike  
 around, probably not to swim,  
 but there is a thread that one can use  
 to navigate safely down into the water,  
 deep down, through submerged trees &  
 other flora, & one will find something  
 worth one’s travels there.

\*\*\*\*\*

*“Rocks & Limpets, Point Lobos, California,” (1965)*

Rocks on the shore, their fissures  
 & cracks, like the imp’s tongue speaking  
 in click-clicks & noise-noises.



\*\*\*\*\*





*"Fern Spring, Dusk, Yosemite Valley, California"*  
(about 1965)

A dream within the Tangled Gate,  
where patches of Dreamland are,  
like ponds, or clearings, a One Woods  
image, a soft frozen springs, plastic,  
misty, water like smoke over rocks  
like plastic, a cry in one direction,  
a song another.

\*\*\*\*\*



*"Mount Clarence King, Pool, Kings Canyon  
National Park"* (about 1925)

There is a pool, edged by mountains,  
topped by clouds, tis deep, deep  
beyond rock, & still; a burnt tree  
nearby, Something lives there,  
I don't know what, the pool &  
the burnt tree = ?

\*\*\*\*\*



*"Churches, Truro, Cape Cod, MA"* (1941)

Two churches, near the sea, two stories,  
kin structures, cemetery near,  
& the sea wind, but not churches,  
but not a cemetery, broad rooms,  
both floors, secret history passed through here.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Notes on the Tangled Gate

I got this idea that I wanted to write a new major narrative poetry sequence, like *Orpheus & Eurydice: Making the Lyre* back in 1998. Written like that work was on a daily basis along Boston metro transit.

Only even more ambitious. Multiple canvases: *Labyrinthine*, *Many Musics*, *Bags End News*, even revive my old Nat Perfect tales.

Call it the Tangled Gate, my coinage for the Labyrinth of Greek myth. Start with the Cretan myth—the Minotaur, half-man, half bull; Ariadne, the Mistress of the Labyrinth; her father, King Minos; Daedalus, the Labyrinth-builder; his son Icarus; & Theseus, the Greek hero who comes to the Island of Crete to slay the Beast & free the sacrifices Athens is compelled to send as tributes to Minos & the Labyrinth's hungry half-man, half-beast prisoner.

From this juicy material mix in Asclepius & the Temple of Dreams; Eleusis & its annual psychedelic ritual; & of course some form of Orpheus & Eurydice.

My work on this these past months ranged among research [*Mazes and Labyrinths* (1922) by W.H. Matthews], notes, & some initial forays in *Bags End News*, *Labyrinthine*, & *Many Musics*. What comes next will be another wave of writing in these projects, beginning with a 36-poem sequence in *Many Musics* called *Tangled Gate*. Further issues of *Bags End News*. Eventually arrive back at *Labyrinthine*, which has been pursuing these kind of ideas for years & hundreds of pages.

What follows here are some notes & sketches I've accumulated toward expanding & integrating the *Tangled Gate* idea.

\*\*\*\*\*

Was it simply to snatch your glance  
from every man & tree, from lilac  
wings & blue dusks, ruffle you enough  
to notice me & keep noticing me,  
that I moved toward that Tangled Gate,  
*notice me, notice me*, I'll kill the Beast  
that consumes the dancers, kill him  
& bring him steaming back to you.

Yes, I will pass into the Tangled Gate—

\*\*\*\*\*

It was the rock band that night,  
 Ariadne's Thread, & I nearly strangled  
 my own breath, & awoke. I was still here,  
 within the Tangled Gate. A whole world  
 here, not a simple maze with a Beast,  
*ahh*. This is why the dancer sacrifices  
 never escaped, never returned. But—

Ariadne's Thread? I looked at my costume,  
 these were my clothes, styles I knew,  
 how had I?

\*\*\*\*\*

I led them to the Tangled Gate,  
 as my father directed, these pretty  
 boys & girls to be eaten by the Beast,  
 but I knew what this meant.

The Tangled Gate was a portal,  
 the Beast really a maw in the earth,  
 where the dancers were consumed  
 to emerge elsewhere, another time.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Tangled Gate is a portal, like the Red Bag. Um. It has existed in different forms in various  
 times & places.

*They breach time & space.  
 They are guarded each one.  
 There is a weakness.  
 A guardian abandoned.  
 She has a broken heart.*

The way through the Tangled Gate is only partly physical. One drinks the elixir, one continues  
 along in dreams.

One Woods. Portals defying time & space.  
 Co-location. Red Bag. Dreamland.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Os Gemos exhibition, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts.*

- Ariadne — Dancer/Mistress of Labyrinth
- Daedalus — Architect
- Theseus — Athenian Hero
- Minos — King
- Minotaur — Half-man, half-bull
- Icarus — Daedalus's son

When Ariadne was young, she felt like a refugee, like the Island she lived on was not her home—the Tangled Gate was the second gift from her father—the dancing ground was the first—

It was Daedalus who constructed the Tangled Gate to imprison the Minotaur but in truth they made a deal, since such a Beast could not be imprisoned—

Theseus was the musician yet his music was secret, would be seen as a weakness—Ariadne was his love but he denied her—

In the Tangled Gate there is a room—Ariadne had used the thread before. long before Theseus—Daedalus had given her different colors which by his artifice would lead her to different places within the Tangled Gate—the black one he forbade, as it led to the Beast—

Ariadne's favorite thread is the white one which leads to what one might call an old farmhouse, & in particular to a room with beguiling works on the wall:

- Mirrors with strange letterings on them—
- Doors hung upon walls, half fallen off—
- A painting Ariadne has dreamed of, a tunnel, a great wheeled carriage on rails; Daedalus would not explain this—
- Two Asian brothers, one played a stringless guitar, the other wore a kind of castle on his head, looked like King Minos's; their songs were all laughter

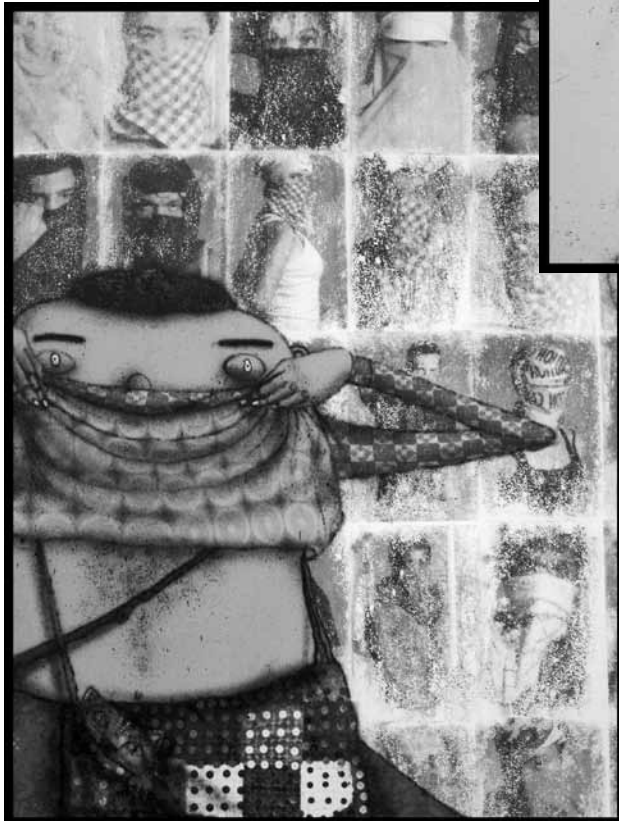
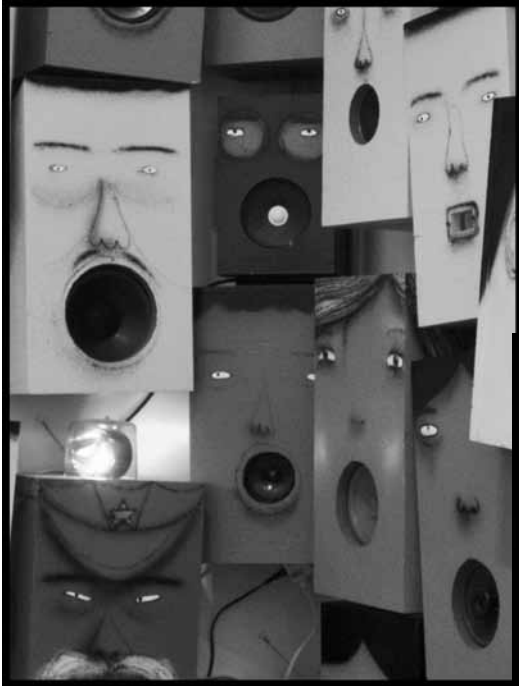
Another room seemed upside down as she entered & its host would natter at her in click-clicks & noise-noises—sometimes in a good mood he would unhinge his face to show the clockworks ticking behind it—there was a hole in his roof/floor—

The cowboy grasped within the wall & hung on—another man spit rainbows—another tiny man lived in a drawer—

The brown & yellow square faces sang greatly on the wall—save one always who would talk to her—

On the train two boys gave her baubles & gifts for a small piece of her thread—

& the scrawny one in the strange hat who would cover his face & those in his mind as she



left—he carried a bag of something he cherished—

\*\*\*\*\*

Listening to Huxley-Leary discussion back in early '60s, audiobook of Leary's autobiography *Flashbacks*—what to do w/LSD—dose them all versus dose the elite—

History shows both have happened—societies have made different choices—

History is progressive, repetitive, & novel—equally? I don't know—

I want to make *Tangled Gate* about all this—what have or haven't I learned, cumulatively speaking? Sometimes no answer is true—always true—

Gravity, mortality, birth, DNA—even these are malleable—So I have no answers, just probable facts, opinions, beliefs—

\*\*\*\*\*

I think my drive is to indicate the basics:

1. The Tangled Gate — the puzzle
2. The Threads — the clue
3. The Beast — Minotaur — the world
4. The Hero — Theseus — arrogance / obscurity
5. The Dancer — Ariadne — love / music
6. The King — Minos — political power
7. The Youth — Icarus — ignorance / idealism
8. The Temple of Dreams — Asclepius / Morpheus — native tool
9. The Elixir — Eleusis — world's gift
10. The Musician — Orpheus — faith midst chaos
11. The Builder — Daedalus — power to physically alter the world
12. Nature — home

Iconic Square. Clover-dale. Red Bag.

*Labyrinthine. Bags End News. Many Musics. Nat Perfect.*

Poems from '94 to '12.

Fuck. 36 poems in 36 days—

Everything. Again.

Reading Matthews' *Mazes & Labyrinths*, I come to two new ideas: the Tangled Gate is fallen in places, ruined, like so many in history. And I don't think I'm writing about the Greek myth literally—just the hot blood of the idea, characters, conflicts—

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12 threads—all locations involved—what do they connect to? Red Bag(s)—which are from Emandia—

\*\*\*\*\*

The Tangled Gate is a wild & varied place, perhaps it's how one navigates the rest—

\*\*\*\*\*

In *Labyrinthine*, Maya gets the box of colored strings in Nat Perfect's store—of course—"The Tangled Gate Game!"—instructions don't help—once Maya walked into Nat Perfect's store, all parts of the multiple narrative engaged—

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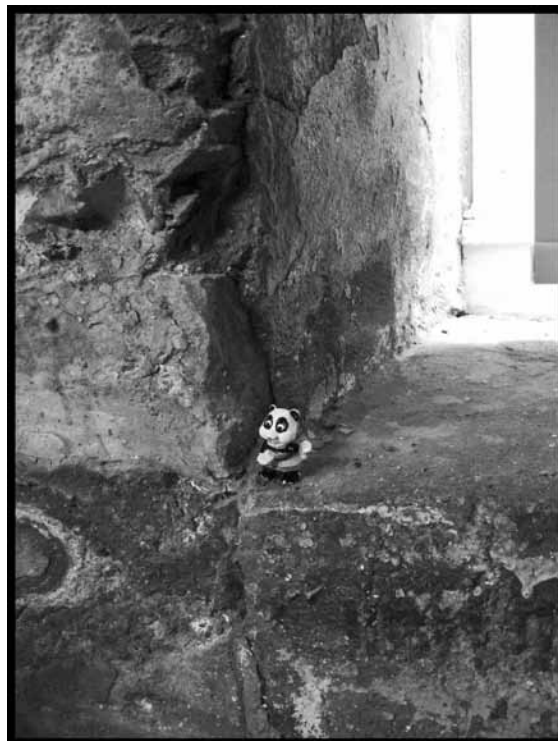
Ariadne loves the Architect, Daedalus. He her. Sends her away, but she learns the Gate was not built by him, or at least what's within, which is a portal—he chases after her, loses her, loses Icarus, despairs—

She returns to the Island, eventually, finds the box of threads where he'd hidden them for her—

\*\*\*\*\*

The challenge will be figuring out where to begin the *Many Musics* sequence, & to include all the various angles, ideas, characters, relations—*Orpheus & Eurydice: Making the Lyre* was a love story, a romance's arc—*Tangled Gate* strives to work wider, stranger ground—I want it to be *fantastic*.

\*\*\*\*\*



From Bags End News #355-356:

"Shood I go into thee Laberinth too find mor kloos?" I asked.

Welll Benney waz awl 4or thiss wilCrissy waz allmozt Boop-lik no.

"Butt iff itt wants too hellp?

Crissee lookd dowtfull.

I think iff thee Redd Bagg wantz too help, then itz Laberinth woodent' bee a hertfull thing," I sed too Crissy mostley butt mebee too me to & I gess Bennee sum butt lazt.

Crissee hugged mee & noded. Thenn shee rumegeed inn herr dresss, oh wate, no pokkets. Shee hikd her dresss upp too gett wat shee wanted.

Itt looked lik a balll of um string.

"Yu need this 4or going inn & thenn kuming bakk, shee sed with abowt haff a uzuell triicky Crissee smil. I willl tak thatt much inn tuff timz.

I noded att themm both & themm pooshed through thee flaping dor intoo thee Laberinth.

I waz abowt middel gy afayd wich iz abowt rit butt I figgered thiz waz weer thee storee waz.

Thay hadd sed iff I needed too I cood com bakk att eny tim. Bennee espeshally sed thatt. 4or a gy whoo livs inn Dreemland, thiss laberinth seemd too spook himm.

Enywaye I wawkd allong. Theer wer no dors allong thee halway I waz inn. Allso nuthing lookd so redd. Strang.

I jest wawkd allong untill I kum too a choyse. Wun waye orr thee othr. I chos with a sniff butt I wont' saye sniffing hellped. Im' nott so guud att itt.

An itt hapened agen. I guss thatz' wat itz' lik butt I waz gladd I hadd mah balll uf string. Itt waz starting too runn loww wich I hadd nott thawt abowt untill now.

Welll, keepe going 4or now. An I wazent' thinking much inn partikuler wen suddenley I herd a gerls' voys calll owt. Allmozt lik shee waz wayting or exxpekting sumwun.

I callld frendley till I cood seey herr.

O!" shee sed sudenley az wee wer fasing eech uthr.

"Itz Okaye, fellla. I meen, gerl.

Shee lookd mee upp an doun tho I dont' gess theer iz much too seey with a short broun an wit beegel. I meen, I dont' bark orr growll or nuthing.

Shee waz a princesss to butt I think nott lik Crissy iz. Thiss gerl waz a princesss lik shee mentatt. No rebell bloo jeens undr.

I deesided too tawk som mor too proov mah frendlee wayz.

Mah nam iz Algernon Beegel. I kam heer frum Bagzend."

I triyed too poynt lik thatt waye butt finellee I jest poynted att mah deepleeted balll uf string.

Shee smild att mee, reelee prity. Shee showed mee herr balll uf I gesss string too. Itt waz wit.

"I ammm Aryadnee, serr, shee sed inn a shly voyse. Thenn shee sort uf kertseyed too mee butt inn this fansey waye thatt went inn a cupel uf direkshuns.





Yu kam just calll mee Algernon," I sed frendlee. Shee noded but awl shiy.

"Wat iz Bagzend? shee asked.

Bagz, Bagzend, fellla."

"O. Shee noded..

Welll, hmm. Good kwestyun. Butt I think I nowed itt too.

Bagzend iz a fantaseeland thatt yu cood find in Mees Chreeses ruum in Konetikut. It lookes lik 3 bigg broun baggs onn a cher inn thee korner."

Aryadnee noded.

"O wate. Shukks. I meen noew theers' a 4orth bag & itz redd becawz wee needed room 4or evrywun too fitt. I gess mah uzuell eksplanashun needed a updat.

Redd?" shee askd. Looking sortuf interested.

I noded. "Thatz weer I kam frum. Iff thiz izent' theer enymor, I meen. I waz gettting mee heers & theerz mixxxed upp. Itz uzuelly nott so hard.

Wee wer fasing eech uthr wich ment I waz looking upp att Aryadney butt thatt waz Okaye.

Weer doo yu kum frum?" I askd politely bekawz I hadd told.

Shee smild stranglelye. "Thee iland? Wee hav allwez livd onn thee iland, I think.

O hmm.

I gess we hav gottenn too heer frum difrent plasis," I sed trying too speek inn sentenses I cood undrstand to.

"I didnt' no theer wer strangrs inn thee Arkitekt' Laberinth, shee sed sudenley.

Wate, yu no thee gy whoo bilt this?"

Shee noded. "He gav mee thiss. I hav difrent culers too go difrent plases inn thee Laberinth.

Woah. Yor string hellps yu figger owt weer yu kan gett to inn heer?"

Shee noded.

I waz starting too gett spookd. Thiss Laberinth waz a lott mor than I figgered.

"Aryadney, I think I need too go bak nowe.

"O! shee sed. Lookd a litel unhapy.

"I meen I lik itt heer & awl butt I hav sum frends wating 4or mee. I dont' want too wery themm.

Shee noded. Smild. I lik yu, Algernon. Yu ar strang butt yu ar deer to."

"Thanks, I sed, frendlee. Yu mak a guud princesss. Mah frend Crissy wood probbley lern tips frum yu, iff shee wantid too.

Aryadney noded politeley.

I willl kum bak tho. I promiss. I hop wee meet inn heer agen & tawk mor."

Sudenley shee givd mee a reel guud hugg & a kisss on mah noggin. I waz gladd I meeted herr.

So I winded mah waye bakk too weer I gess thee Redd Bagg ended. wich meenz thee Laberinth iz a sumweer els. O.

Eventualley mah string balll gott fulll & I arrivd bak att thee flaping dor. I pooshed onn throo nott nowing iff Crissy or Beny wood still bee theer. Welll I gess Crissy wood. Mebee Beny.

Thay wer<sup>s</sup> both theer. An thay lookd serprizd.  
 "Howe farr did yu go, Algernon?" Crissy askd between  
 her ferst hugg & sekund.  
 Pritty farr, Crissy," I hugged bakk.  
 Bennee cawt mah atenshun. "Yu wer gon lesss than a minit.  
 A lot lesss. We thawt yu forgot sumthing.  
 I shook mah hed. I waz inn theer a long tim. I mett  
 Princesss Ariadne<sup>y</sup> & evrything."  
 "Aryadney? they askd lik wun.  
 Yah shee sed herr nam lik thatt. Shee livs on an iland.  
 Wich iz weerd. I think thay hav a redd bagg to. An shee haz  
 difrent culerd strings too go difrent plasis in the Laberinth.  
 Shee waz prity nis. I think we cood find her & ask herr  
 usefull kwestyuns." I waz rambling onn so much I didnt' seey  
 howe shokked Crissy & Bennye wer both.  
 Welll, I willl jest saye thiss inn sum. I told them  
 mah hol tripp inn evry detale I cood mak upp. Thay lissend  
 lik breething.  
 "I think wee need too telll Shlela & thee rest befor wee  
 go bakk, I sed.  
 Thay noded.  
 So thatt, deer reedrs, iz howe thiss ferst storee abowt  
 the Redd Bagg endz. Itz a big thing & I gess thatt meens  
 big gys gett involvd. welll I hop we go soon. I think itt  
 wood bee nis too see Ariadne<sup>y</sup> agen.

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From *Labyrinthine*:

Remember some things. This is the lost or obscured purpose of the Tangled Gate. You will enter as a group, pretty dancers offered as a sacrifice to the Beast within, but I alone know what you will find. I know the ways within better than all, I am the one the Architect gave the threads to.

The Architect loves me but cannot say it directly to me. He watches me dance with the rest, watches how I bend & move, does not know I move to please his notice.

The stories of what happened in the Tangled Gate are wrong. A sort of grand misunderstanding. Distortions & lies & stupid guesses.

I went with the Hero because the Architect would not claim me to my father. He came after me in a desperate flight, & brought his son who wanted me too & would have gone to my father with the Architect's intents! Not a bad boy & I was sorry he died. I . . . no, not that sorry. If not for him, the Architect would have come for me. On that island where I was left.

Not because the great Hero spurned me. I knew five minutes after I left with him that I was wrong. The other girls had a phrase: prick on a stick. They preferred that really. Suck it, fuck it, empty it one way or another, & the rest of it for you. The money, lands, whatever. Just don't sell short picking your prick.

He wanted me in his harem. They were all returning with him to the mainland, still not knowing what had happened.

Every seven years sacrifices had to be made to the Beast, a group of boy & girl virgins, trained as dancers, to be consumed.

Not this time. Because of me.

The previous time I had been a child, I had watched half-understanding what unfolded. I wasn't sure but I didn't like it.

Being the princess meant my own father indulged me. Living on an island limited my world of interests.

In short, the Tangled Gate caught my fancy. The King ordered the Architect to indulge all of my questions.

He did, with a smile. And I will say that I believed at first it was all necessary somehow. But, eventually, no, I determined to know better.

My mother told me little but when I first bled she gave me a talk to make up for the rest.

"Don't lead with your heart, it will blind you."

"What then?"

"Sniff."

"Sniff?"

"When boys & men near you, learn to sniff. Let it lead your thoughts. Use the rest, but lead with your sniff."

We never talked like that again but I used her advice. And learned: the Architect & his son both wanted me, the son more blatantly.

A wispy, arrogant boy, not quite a prick on a stick, but other girls fancied him. Rouged lips, lower cut clothing, tight, he consumed but kept me in view.

The Architect said nothing. Practically only looked at me in his deepest dreams. But he looked, he wanted, with the hunger of a man, not a boy.

I made him teach me about the Tangled Gate. How & why.

A Beast in there, & it seemed this Beast was the issue from my mother coupling with a bull, wearing the lady bull contraption the Architect built for her.

I laughed. "None of that is true."

He started, nearly looked at me. Rough, flirty costumes? Not me. I was cruel.

"My mother fucked a mythical bull & had a half-man, half-bull beast that you locked up in the Tangled Gate built at the order of my father?"

One sniff told me his mind was licking inside my thighs, yearning to make me moan & release entirely to him. Still he was able to talk. *Ah beautiful.*

"Why would you doubt what I've told you?"

"And the sacrifice of virgins by the mainland? From a petty insult?"

He was biting my thigh, my ass, hard, owning me, hurting me to make me pay attention. *Oh yes* I wasn't even looking at him. I was at his spyglass that looked into the paths & complexities of the Gate.

"Tell me the truth. Or don't you respect me enough to?"

He flinched. I think it was then I realized we loved each other. As improbable as this was, as much as not a word had been said of the sort. I was his only pupil & I spent all my days visiting him in his tower offices. I had seen all the maps. I knew the ins & outs better than

anyone else.

"Tell me."

He shook his head. He was scared. Not looking at me, studying a map, I was in his arms & he was scared.

"You didn't build it."

Silence. "No."

"The Beast isn't my mother's son."

Quietly. "No."

"Does my father know?"

"No. I came ahead from the rest when we left the mainland. I told him later it would serve as a prison, an intimidating legend against those who would follow. He nodded. Trusted me."

And does now with his daughter. *Ah yes.*

"And the Beast?"

"It's his."

"He lives in it?"

"No. I think it's how he travels between worlds & times."

"A portal?"

None of this made sense to me but I knew my father only cared about eventually taking back the mainland. He seemed to confuse the Architect with a necromancer who had turned what he once claimed was a simple, elaborate prison into something else. Fine. Saw my interest. Better than boys for now. Saving me for a strategic pairing.

And the Hero? The sacrifices? The Architect didn't know what had happened to them the first time.

"They never came back?"

"No."

"They were payments to my father for an insult?"

"Anything to keep him here."

So here they come again but this time among them a Hero.  
I sniffed. I knew.

I convinced the Architect to help them.

"If they survive, they can tell us about it. The Beast, what happens in there."

He didn't like it. I leaned in, breathed quietly. I waited.

"A thread."

I nodded.

Then he showed me the box. A box of spooled threads. Different colors. I looked at him as he was gnawing my nipples so hard I winced into his eyes.

"Which color?"

"The White"

"And the rest?"

"There are different paths through, to different places."

*Undress me, hurry, I want to please you, I am ready, I want your hard heat in me, your desire so long past ready, take me, consume me, I will let you, & let you, & let you, & then I will take some too.*



“When you lead them out—”

“I’m not going in?”

“When they’re coming out, I want you to go with them to the mainland. Leave here. Be with the one among them concealed to save the lot.”

I looked at him as my clothes immolated, as my torso fused to him in pain & love. I loved him. I was his. There was nothing else. No other truths to know.

“Why?”

“Just go. Go with him. There will be war & your father will lose.”

“You know?”

He nods at me. “He doesn’t listen.”

His voice falters. His love for me cracks open, plainly. “Go with him & direct him take you far. Far!”

So now you understand more than you did. I went because the Architect sent me away with the Hero & the dancers. The Hero considered me just one more pretty among many he had liberated that day. With *my* thread.

I hurt him when he came for me. The Architect had given me a word when we parted. He was a necromancer in some ways, I suppose. I hurt the Hero when he came for me in my bed.

He left me on that island with some of his harem.

And the Architect continued to follow me, & took his son, who died in their flight. And this loss took my Architect from me thereafter.

I returned to the Island finally, eventually, & I took up my residence in the tower offices, & eventually I found the box of colored threads where the Architect had hidden them for me. Perchance I return.

Now you know all, Maya. Now you know.

And one more thing to tell. I will search these paths & corridors, I will roam time & space & dimensions, until I find him, for he isn’t dead. He despairs his son but he lives still. *He loves me*. I will find him. I sniff & know this true.

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November is for the *Tangled Gate*—I need to look up my old *Orpheus & Eurydice* notebooks—I just want to refresh & begin anew from there—*O&E* was big for me then—I’ve done bigger since, but it remains special in content & composition—

I don’t have anything in mind for how it begins—but gathering these notes has helped—I’ve done a heap of research & writing already—

What is its drive? When Ariadne returns? What causes her return? Is the place still inhabited? What of the Tangled Gate & the Beast? She finds the box of threads in Daedalus’s abandoned

tower, he left it hid where only she would think to look—

How old is she when she returns? Is she convinced he has returned? Had he ever left? What of her intervening years? It starts there, her return. She'd never been back since she left with Theseus & he abandoned her on that island. Why? Had she been told Daedalus was dead in the ocean like Icarus?

What brings her back? Dreams.

The story, then, returns her to Crete, to enter the Tangled Gate, again. To find him. Is it many years later?

What does she find? Within the Gate she loses age. Neither old nor young anymore. An untellable sensation.

OK—soon to write this—



\* \* \* \* \*







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*Judith Haggai*

mind climbs mountain  
all glows with sky shine  
till neighbour yawns

\* \* \*

calico cat  
leaps onto neighbour's roof  
private nap

\* \* \*

neighbour dog  
flat on dry grass  
listens for flies

\* \* \*

rain passes  
far from my lemon tree  
dry leaf sigh

\* \* \*

lone motorbike  
cracks dawn stillness  
far as the ear flies

\* \* \*

surprise!  
flies find other targets  
this early morn

\* \* \*

soft bird tune  
gently greets morning  
no longer alone

\* \* \*

moments of laughter  
chain together  
into garlands

\* \* \*

search for reality  
anywhere but here  
i stop to breathe

\* \* \*

bean sprouts!  
sudden need for attention  
and now i'm awake

\* \* \*

absence  
heart grows fonder  
until presence

\* \* \*

until the harvest  
peanut butter  
from the store

\* \* \*

mistress earth  
blows sand dunes  
in my path

\* \* \*

smells of ancient seas  
bits of conch shell in the sand  
history giggles

\* \* \*

unzip the sky  
remove the ceiling  
flow into space

\* \* \* \* \*



*Jorge Luis Borges*



## Circular Ruins

[Classic Fiction]

(From *Ficciones*, 1962)

*“And if he left off dreaming about you . . .”*  
—Through the Looking Glass, VI.

No one saw him disembark in the unanimous night, no one saw the bamboo canoe sink into the sacred mud, but in a few days there was no one who did not know that that taciturn man came from the South and that his home had been one of those numberless villages upstream in the deeply cleft side of the mountain, where the Zend language has not been contaminated by Greek and where leprosy is infrequent. What is certain is that the gray man kissed the mud, climbed up the bank without pushing aside (probably, without feeling) the blades which were lacerating his flesh, and crawled, nauseated and bloodstained, up to the circular enclosure crowned with a stone tiger or horse, which sometimes was the color of flame and now was that of ashes. This circle was a temple which had been devoured by ancient fires, profaned by miasmal jungle, and whose lowercase god no longer received the homage of men. The stranger stretched himself out beneath the pedestal. He was awakened by the sun high overhead. He was not astonished to find that his wounds had healed; he closed his pallid eyes and slept, not through weakness of flesh but through determination of will. He knew that this temple was the place required for his invincible intent; he knew that the incessant trees had not succeeded in strangling the ruins of another propitious temple downstream which had once belonged to gods now burned and dead; he knew that his immediate obligation was to dream. Toward midnight he was awakened by the inconsolable shriek of a bird. Tracks of bare feet, some figs and a jug warned him that the men of the region had been spying respectfully on his sleep, soliciting his protection or afraid of his magic. He felt a chill, and sought out a sepulchral niche in the dilapidated wall where he concealed himself among unfamiliar leaves.

The purpose which guided him was not impossible, though supernatural. He wanted to dream a man; he wanted to dream him in minute entirety and impose him on reality. This magic project had exhausted the entire expanse of his mind; if someone had asked him his name or to relate some event of his former life, he would not have been able to give an answer. This uninhabited, ruined temple suited him, for it contained a minimum of visible world; the proximity of the workmen also suited him, for they took it upon themselves to provide for his frugal needs. The rice and fruit they brought him were nourishment enough for his body, which was consecrated to sole task of sleeping and dreaming.

At first, his dreams were chaotic; then in a short while they become dialectic in nature. The stranger dreamed that he was in the center of a circular amphitheater which was more or less the burnt temple; clouds of taciturn students filled the tiers of seats; the faces of the farthest



ones hung at a distance of many centuries and as high as the stars, but their features were completely precise. The man lectured his pupils on anatomy, cosmography, and magic: the faces listened anxiously and tried to answer understandingly, as if they guessed the importance of that examination which would redeem one of them from his condition of empty illusion and interpolate him into the real world. Asleep or awake, the man thought over the answers of his phantoms, did not allow himself to be deceived by imposters, and in certain perplexities he sensed a growing intelligence. He was seeking a soul worthy of participating in the universe.

After nine or ten nights he understood with a certain bitterness that he could expect nothing from those pupils who accepted his doctrine passively, but he could expect something from those who occasionally dared to oppose him. The former group, although worthy of love and affection, could not ascend to the level of individuals; the latter pre-existed to a slightly greater degree. One afternoon (now afternoons were also given over to sleep, now he was only awake for a couple of hours at daybreak) he dismissed the vast illusory student body for good and kept only one pupil. He was a taciturn, sallow boy, at times intractable, and whose sharp features resembled those of his dreamer. The brusque elimination of his fellow students did not disconcert him for long; after a few private lessons, his progress was enough to astound the teacher. Nevertheless, a catastrophe took place. One day, the man emerged from his sleep as if from a viscous desert, looked at the useless afternoon light which he immediately confused with the dawn, and understood that he had not dreamed. All that night and all day long, the intolerable lucidity of insomnia fell upon him. He tried exploring the forest, to lose his strength; among the hemlock he barely succeeded in experiencing several short snatches of sleep, veined with fleeting, rudimentary visions that were useless. He tried to assemble the student body but scarcely had he articulated a few brief words of exhortation when it became deformed and was then erased. In his almost perpetual vigil, tears of anger burned his old eyes.

He understood that modeling the incoherent and vertiginous matter of which dreams are composed was the most difficult task that a man could undertake, even though he should penetrate all the enigmas of a superior and inferior order; much more difficult than weaving a rope out of sand or coining the faceless wind. He swore he would forget the enormous hallucination which had thrown him off at first, and he sought another method of work. Before putting it into execution, he spent a month recovering his strength, which had been squandered by his delirium.

He abandoned all premeditation of dreaming and almost immediately succeeded in sleeping a reasonable part of each day. The few times that he had dreams during this period, he paid no attention to them. Before resuming his task, he waited until the moon's disk was perfect. Then, in the afternoon, he purified himself in the waters of the river, worshipped the planetary gods, pronounced the prescribed syllables of a mighty name, and went to sleep. He dreamed almost immediately, with his heart throbbing.

He dreamed that it was warm, secret, about the size of a clenched fist, and of a garnet color within the penumbra of a human body as yet without face or sex; during fourteen lucid nights he dreamt of it with meticulous love. Every night he perceived it more clearly. He did not touch it; he only permitted himself to witness it, to observe it, and occasionally to rectify it with a glance. He perceived it and lived it from all angles and distances. On the fourteenth night he lightly touched the pulmonary artery with his index finger, then the whole heart, outside and inside. He was satisfied with the examination. He deliberately did not dream for a night; he then took up the heart again, invoked the name of a planet, and undertook the vision

of another of the principle organs. Within a year he had come to the skeleton and the eyelids. The innumerable hair was perhaps the most difficult task. He dreamed an entire man—a young man, but who did not sit up or talk, who was unable to open his eyes. Night after night, the man dreamt him asleep.

In the Gnostic cosmogonies, demiurges fashion a red Adam who cannot stand; as clumsy, crude and elemental as this Adam of dust was the Adam of dreams forged by the wizard's nights. One afternoon, the man almost destroyed his entire work, but then changed his mind. (It would have been better had he destroyed it.) When he had exhausted all supplications to the deities of the earth, he threw himself at the feet of the effigy which was perhaps a tiger or perhaps a colt and implored its unknown help. That evening, at twilight, he dreamt of the statue. He dreamt it was alive, tremulous: it was not an atrocious bastard of a tiger and a colt, but at the same time these two fiery creatures and also a bull, a rose, and a storm. This multiple god revealed to him that his earthly name was Fire, and that in this circular temple (and in others like it) people had once made sacrifices to him and worshipped him, and that he would magically animate the dreamed phantom, in such a way that all creatures, except Fire itself and the dreamer, would believe it to be a man of flesh and blood. He commanded that once this man had been instructed in all the rites, he should be sent to the other ruined temple whose pyramids were still standing downstream, so that some voice would glorify him in that deserted edifice. In the dream of the man that dreamed, the dreamed one awoke.

The wizard carried out the orders he had been given. He devoted a certain length of time (which finally proved to be two years) to instructing him in the mysteries of the universe and the cult of fire. Secretly, he was pained at the idea of being separated from him. On the pretext of pedagogical necessity, each day he increased the number of hours dedicated to dreaming. He also remade the right shoulder, which was somewhat defective. At times, he was disturbed by the impression that all this had already happened . . . . In general, his days were happy; when he closed his eyes, he thought: Now I will be with my son. Or, more rarely: The son I have engendered is waiting for me and will not exist if I do not go to him.

Gradually, he began accustoming him to reality. Once he ordered him to place a flag on a faraway peak. The next day the flag was fluttering on the peak. He tried other analogous experiments, each time more audacious. With a certain bitterness, he understood that his son was ready to be born—and perhaps impatient. That night he kissed him for the first time and sent him off to the other temple whose remains were turning white downstream, across many miles of inextricable jungle and marshes. Before doing this (and so that his son should never know that he was a phantom, so that he should think himself a man like any other) he destroyed in him all memory of his years of apprenticeship.

His victory and peace became blurred with boredom. In the twilight times of dusk and dawn, he would prostrate himself before the stone figure, perhaps imagining his unreal son carrying out identical rites in other circular ruins; at night he no longer dreamed, or dreamed as any man does. His perception of the sounds and forms of the universe became somewhat pallid: his absent son was being nourished by these diminutions of his soul. The purpose of his life had been fulfilled; the man remained in a kind of ecstasy. After a certain time, which some chroniclers prefer to compute in years and others in decades, two oarsmen awoke him at midnight; he could not see their faces, but they spoke to him of a charmed man in a temple of the North, capable of walking on fire without burning himself. The wizard suddenly remembered the words of the god. He remembered that of all the creatures that people the

earth, Fire was the only one who knew his son to be a phantom. This memory, which at first calmed him, ended by tormenting him. He feared lest his son should meditate on this abnormal privilege and by some means find out he was a mere simulacrum. Not to be a man, to be a projection of another man's dreams—what an incomparable humiliation, procreated (or permitted) out of the mere confusion of happiness; it was natural that the wizard should fear for the future of that son whom he had thought out entrail by entrail, feature by feature, in a thousand and one secret nights.

His misgivings ended abruptly, but not without certain forewarnings. First (after a long drought) a remote cloud, as light as a bird, appeared on a hill; then, toward the South, the sky took on the rose color of leopard's gums; then came clouds of smoke which rusted the metal of the nights; afterwards came the panic-stricken flight of wild animals. For what had happened many centuries before was repeating itself. The ruins of the sanctuary of the god of Fire was destroyed by fire. In a dawn without birds, the wizard saw the concentric fire licking the walls. For a moment, he thought of taking refuge in the water, but then he understood that death was coming to crown his old age and absolve him from his labors. He walked toward the sheet of flames. They did not bite his flesh; they caressed him and flooded him without heat or combustion. With relief, with humiliation, with terror, he understood that he also was an illusion, that someone else was dreaming him.

*Translated by Anthony Bonner*

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*Raymond Soulard, Jr.*



## Many Musics

### Eighth Series

*When did it matter most?  
When I smiled at another & believed.*

#### *xiii. Tomorrow's News*

When the ships overhead descend,  
if they were to slave, use the world  
as crops, as men do now, but badly,  
would it take no more than a flash  
of glowing wings, a hard bark about  
judgment & punishment, to subdue  
resistance & fear to submission? Who  
would challenge God's arrived minions  
but some of the children, a handful of the freaks,  
& a scattering too few to overwhelm  
the millions well-raised for the lash  
& unexplained condemn from the skies?

\*\*\*\*\*

*xiv. Emandia*

I fell asleep, sad again, & looking far  
 into the darkness I could see the cankerous  
 shaft in me, its veins twisting maybe deep  
 as blood, oh yes, could see how it bore  
 through, then, the most lost, secret  
 sweet of thens, barely a seed with limbs,  
 unaware my unspent life, to now,  
 taking in all it could, a blind, unhappy,  
 frenzied mortal feeding, consuming  
 & yet not all, for there was something else,  
 an opposite, what?

Another shaft, of music, culminating music,  
 a shaft of forest breezes, ocean waves,  
 leaves, curling inward, open hands, even  
 closed ones, the coming harmonies of  
 mutual gain & get, putting on another's  
 dream to understand, the pink & purple  
 & green colors of want, & I wished, seeing  
 both plain now, to near the one & dismiss  
 the other. But I woke this morning  
 with both still. Knowledge of the canker  
 does not free, nor does the music diminish.

Each feeds me still, of each other, &  
 the play is mine to let the canker  
 thrive or follow, *yes*, I am nobody,  
 yes, I am nothing, yes, *I still sing*.  
 Become again, anew, the wild violet shaft  
 crying, thrusting inexorably into the  
 twining grasp of this great gaping universe.

\*\*\*\*\*

*xv. Claude Monet*

I wish I knew you, Claude Monet,  
as your teachers did, & as you  
knew your colors. How many cities knew  
you too, as you painted their churches & canals,  
Claude Monet, I wish I knew you as a friend,  
to sit & watch the day with,  
know your rustling breath, study your  
beautiful hands. I wish I knew you,  
Claude Monet, as your dreams which recurred,  
as the canvasses you stretched, your paints,  
your brushes. I wish I'd been a wheatstack  
or a water lily you studied for hours to figure,  
to find where eye & colors & the movement  
of hand might coalesce now, & forever.  
I wish I had known you, Claude Monet,  
as something you loved enough to keep.

\*\*\*\*\*

*xvi. Carry Me Back*

Later there was a film about her,  
 the dead girl traveling north where  
 all comes from, it had gotten easier  
 since she'd been dead, the pressures  
 were fewer from body & clan, & the scene  
 that really convinced me was when  
 she'd made it to the shore & it's snowing,  
 big chunks of snow, like cottage cheese  
 or something, & she begins to disassemble  
 herself to understand, at first  
 the pleasure of watching her vague  
 garments reveal a slender torso,  
 pleasing breasts, soft ass, even shaved pussy,  
 but then she uncouples them from  
 herself, they had come later after all,  
 & the skin softer as she news & undoes,  
 her blood unremembering its hungers & imperatives,  
 oh yes, & the glisten of early songs,  
 first songs, it comes apart easier around her,  
 as the cottage cheese snow diminishes,  
 & she is left just with the wish  
 to understand before she even knows why.

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*xvii. Atop Mt. Cloudy Day*

You reach the top or end of  
 something & all there is  
 is to look down or back.

\*\*\*\*\*





*xviii. After a Time**[F.B., "Hot Air Ballooning Off Normandy," oil on plywood, 20<sup>th</sup> cent.]*

When you start losing your legs,  
 the world seems more ferociously moving,  
 & you find yourself looking up,  
 more & more, for an offer of wide wings,  
 a soft ride in a striped air balloon, or  
 maybe that long swim to the bottom  
 finally coming due.

\*\*\*\*\*

*xix. Manneport near Etratat*

The plaque to Monet's paintings tells of  
 this great rocky gate but another view  
 says that it is a leg taking a long step into  
 the sea, toward something new, greet  
 the far landless depths, learn some things,  
 remember others, great rocks dream too,  
 & the sea will enjoy the visit, tales from  
 new company, yes, I think it's time  
 everybody saw this too & accepted tis  
 a journey begun, more steps to come,  
 & at the stateliest of gaits.

\*\*\*\*\*

xx. *Homer's "Weather Beaten," 1894*

*"For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."  
—Wendell Berry, "The Peace of Wild Things," 1969.*

I wish to crash with your waves,  
not against them, not ignore them  
for not being man-shaped or talking like men.  
I wish to uncouple from my simple ideas  
of dawn & dusk, as though light disappears  
entirely, feel like the sky my colors changing,  
wish to disintegrate like driftwood,  
without woe or metaphor, & eventually  
spread what I hark out to every point  
of the globe, wet & dry, feel every pulse,  
every breathing, now a fiber knowing  
its weaving, no longer harried or hanging on  
because I know everything needs me too  
& is seeking to keep me my place.

\*\*\*\*\*

xxi. *The Tangled Gate [Sketch #1]*

Remember some things. This is the lost purpose  
or forgotten, obscured, of the tangled gate.  
You will enter as a group, pretty dancers  
offered as a king's sacrifice, but I know  
what you will find. Each of you will arrive  
but alone, but only by heeding me in this.  
Through the tangled gate, neither left nor right,  
on & on & on, now into the great mouth,  
the great beastly mouth. On in, one by one,  
heed me in this. On in.

\*\*\*\*\*



*xxiii. The Tangled Gate [Sketch #2]*

I watch you roaming the tangled gate,  
 & you try to understand, where were  
 the dance steps I taught you? Which color  
 thread is the clue to which path?  
 You sniff & pause, & press your hands &  
 breath to the walls, those of clay &  
 other vines. You wish to know, to feel  
 your blood walk calmly the gate as though  
 through the stars themselves. Heart's  
 deepest feeling the map to all  
 the worlds of creation. I watch you.  
 You sing, you talk softly. You move slowly,  
 you run, you stop. Nothing orchestrates  
 you, Ariadne, not you nor the stars themselves.  
 I watch you, note by note, glance, glare,  
 green leaves blow places you don't know  
 within, where lead & know & how let off,  
 & the gate untangles past all ceasings of cease.

\*\*\*\*\*

*xxiii. The Tangled Gate [Sketch #3]*

You wonder who let the elixir in,  
    & you look around for a face or  
office of intent, look back, far back,  
    now far on, beyond your station,  
the stars in your night skies.

You wonder who let the elixir in,  
    & marvel a little at how time & space,  
how foolish, how funny, now let it  
    some more, look far, look back,  
beyond your station, your roots, your dreams.

You wonder who let the elixir in,  
    as though the plan, its masters,  
their secret book, its language  
    to master & teach, stare harder into  
the fire, grow blinder, listen till you see.

You wonder who let the elixir in  
    as you wonder on want & what will delight  
perpetually a moment's sugared laughing,  
    what will calm the many tongues & their guns,  
oh tell how, sing why, by the beg, by the pray,  
    you wonder who let the elixir in when  
look, your hand is on the tap & see it flow.

\*\*\*\*\*

*xxiv. The Tangled Gate [Sketch #4]*

We sit together, you & I, & at first  
 our breathing distrusts, because  
 this room isn't big enough & it has  
 no windows. But our hearts are listening  
 too, looking for the music even as we  
 still tangle in tongues. They beat,  
 there is the beginnings of music,  
 there is silence, how music continues.

We sit together, you & I, & this is  
 ten thousand years ago & this is tonight  
 & this is when the earth has blown all to light.  
 This room isn't big enough but here  
 we are & the music between us has begun.  
 You call me ugly & I return yours with  
 a nod, & we both start laughing.  
 This is how I remember those days best.

We sit together, you & I, & you are  
 gone some years now, & your laughter  
 remains in my mind. And this room still isn't  
 big but I can see now the possibilities  
 of windows. Make them with fists,  
 or maybe open hands. Every day's deciding.



\* \* \* \* \*





## Gateway Mexico

[Travel Journal]

Not long after Dr. Seligmann gave him the green light, an Aztec shaman materialized in N's hometown. The visitor's name was barely pronounceable: Nezahualcoyotl. He was from Mexico City and had been invited to speak at a seminar on mysticism at the local Rudolph Steiner society. He was a short, rotund man in his early 70s with brown skin, a salt-and-pepper goatee, a melodious voice, and eyes like interstellar voids. Introducing him, one of the organizers said that Nezahualcoyotl and his students had been the first Aztec shamans to be invited to participate in the Sun Dance of the Lakota Sioux in North Dakota, and he had later been granted the right to organize and perform Sun Dances of his own.

Nezahualcoyotl spoke through an interpreter, a local woman who sat on his left.

"I find that the mystical thing is a bit beyond the religious," he began. "It's beyond personal achievement, or other people. The mystical state is a feeling.

"Perhaps I don't consider myself very mystical, but I fall under many definitions of the mystic.

"Why do I dedicate myself to that, why do I investigate, why do I have my experiences? That's because inside me, I have my message. I believe that at the moment of conception, we receive cosmic energies. They come to where the conception is taking place. And these energies are sent from every point in the universe, everywhere in space. We're all mixes of energies, we're codes of energies that mix together inside us; and in this manner the genetic code is formed. That's the force that moves the masculine and feminine elements. It combines them and begins to organize, much like a computer. The energies combine and begin to form programs, and a new being. Each one of us is a unique and marvelous creation. No two of us are the same. Each one of us receives a distinct destiny code that we receive from the forces of the universe. The zygote is the point of concentration for these forces. In these moments is formed this being, this body, the color of the eyes, everything that he or she inherits from the preceding generations. This being has a mission, to conserve the chain of evolution, and to enrich it with his or her own experiences. The system is always forming new and different beings because the components that make them up are always in flux. The earth is always moving around the sun; the sun is moving as well. So it's impossible that this instant will come to be again; so it's impossible to have two people who are exactly the same.

"In each generation a certain number are born—not many of them, perhaps—who are born different from the rest. And now they've also been termed 'mutants.' They're people who have another sensibility; they're different. How can you recognize a mutant? They usually pass unnoticed among the rest, like one of the crowd. They're in no way superior to the rest; nothing draws your attention. They live in their own worlds. They're able to maintain themselves; with a minimal expenditure of energy, they earn money, and all they need to live. They don't have to work too hard. They don't get rich; nothing to call attention to themselves. This type of person normally has a little bit of trouble talking. Normally he doesn't begin to talk at an



early age. Or it can be that he doesn't pronounce words well. Sometimes he talks confusedly or in a loud voice, or so softly you can hardly hear. This man lives in a different world. He's a mystic. The mystic is a person who's outside of this world without being outside it. Apparently he's existing where he's existing, but he seeks solitude, he seeks out places where the forces present themselves. It's not that he looks for places of power, but that his own destiny takes him to them. There, he feels very calm, and there he has his own experiences. He doesn't look for experiences: he has them. He has access to visions, to revelations of things that can't be perceived by everyone. He receives them like messages. It seems like someone is talking to him: he hears voices. He hears the voices and says, 'Ay! Someone is communicating with me.' Also he begins to feel, in his body, another class of sensations. For instance, he feels that the wind is caressing him. He feels like multiple hands are caressing his body when the wind blows. Or he feels the caresses of the sun. But he feels it: it's not an idea, it's not a theory, it's really the heat, the energy of the sun; not just the heat, but a series of different energies that come from the sun and from outer space. He doesn't know why, but sometimes it makes him want to cry. It's something that comes to him from outside. Why is this? It's because he's very sensitive. And he's following a process of sensitization. At first, perhaps, he feels bad. He doesn't know what's happening to his body. But as the years pass he gets used to it, gets used to receiving messages which are clearer and clearer. At the beginning he may see shapes in the periphery of his vision which last seconds. He'll be looking at a point straight ahead, and ninety degrees to each side, he'll see forms. He'll turn quickly and they'll be gone. But he concentrates and begins to see luminous beings. He thinks he feels them touching his body. In sum, he begins to get used to it. So he begins to experiment, little by little, little by little. When a communication transpires, he says, 'Welcome. I want more.'

"And so it results that he has no more fear of death. He's not afraid of spirits, of ghosts. He's not afraid of the unknown; he seeks it out. He perceives another world. Because the other world exists. And the other world is what's beyond death. And so death does not exist for him. The man transcends. After his body breaks down, he continues to exist. And so this world isn't so important anymore. It's the other world that attracts him, and where he's certain to be happy. He's here because, physically, he's been put here. But, with other senses, which are beyond the five senses, he's perceiving the other world, and he can travel. This is what some people call astral travel. I don't know what to call it.

"In my experience, the ceremonies and the indigenous world that we are developing are completely different from the Western world. The values are different. Money doesn't attract us, doesn't enslave us. We attract it, it comes, and we spend it. The things that seem very important, we don't hoard. We don't eat greedily, just to maintain our life. We don't live to eat, we eat to live. In the same way, all the perceptions that come are welcomed. When you lose your fear of the unknown, when you lose your fear of death, you begin to truly live. You become aware that you're a passenger. At least, I've arrived at the conclusion that this world in which we're living right now isn't real. It's a lie. It's only a form in our mind. Our senses perceive it—our senses which are conditioned to perceive this universe, which is an energy that's vibrating at a special frequency. This universe doesn't exist at other wavelengths. Right now, right where we're sitting, there are innumerable quantities of radio waves transmitted by thousands of stations all over the world. And here they are; and we can turn on a radio and bring them in. That apparatus contains crystals that, if they approach one another, vibrate a certain number of times per second. And if they draw apart, they vibrate at another number of

times per second. For example, nine hundred kilocycles, and you have a whole world: a world of sound, of messages, music, et cetera. You move the crystals a bit and you have another. This is what lets us know that we're vibrating at a wavelength which permits the existence of this moment, and this space, but which has no validity in others. And here there are innumerable waves. Wave frequencies, like radio waves, television waves, cosmic rays, and other waves, an infinite number. So you become aware that this world isn't so much, that it's not so valuable. The important thing is the experiences you have.

"When you're sincere, when you're not someone who was born with another destiny, but you want to be a mystic, you have to suffer a lot. A person who decides to be a mystic without being born one can become one. But it's going to cost him sweat. Work. Blood. Suffering. Pain. We call it the path of pain. You have to suffer a lot to dominate your appetites. You come to do your autosacrifice, and you can follow special diets, you close off all the things of this world, all the pleasures and satisfactions, you work on this from sunrise to sunset every day of your life. He who is born a mystic doesn't need all this. He begins naturally to perceive, without forcing himself. I think this kind of mystic is the best. But normally, people consider them to be crazy, because they're different. These madmen, I call holy fools, because they're the ones who change the direction of the world.

"Jesus Christ, for example. He was crazy. Who could believe in his teachings? They included his giving up his life! But you also have an Einstein, who was chased out of Germany. They persecuted him, they didn't believe in what he said until atomic energy was developed. He was a mystic. His mysticism revolutionized physics. We have another example: Leonardo DaVinci. He assimilated information since his beginning. Anything that he set himself to do, he did it, and he did it the best way possible. Like a superior man, a man of the future. He embraced and monopolized the fields of architecture, drawing, science, anatomy, painting. Anything he did, he did in a superior way. He was a mystic, one who was born doing it.

"There are others who became mystics because of an accident. I've known people who have received a blow to the head, or to some other part of the body, a well-placed blow, and it alters their awareness. Perhaps for moments, perhaps for hours. When this happens, they go crazy. They go into another world. It's what we indigenous people call the world of the spirits. A mysticism, then, is born, and it's the ability to communicate with other dimensions, in a spontaneous manner, without trying. You simply let it take you. What is the mystic's mission? To be superior? No. The mystic's mission isn't to be famous in all the world. It's not to gain power or a lot of money. It's not to stand out. It's simply to examine all the sensations that come to him. And each one of them brings him happiness, and brings him to that to which all mysticism leads: ecstasy. Extraphysical sensations come to him, more advanced every time, which bring him to ecstasy. Ecstasy is the goal of the mystic. All his sensitivity combines to take him there. How do we define the state of ecstasy? It's a marvelous state in which you feel that you become weightless. You feel that you lose all feelings of pain, anguish, fear, and you find yourself very much on top of all that. I want to bring myself as close as possible to the state of ecstasy. To me, it's equal to orgasm. Orgasm, when you feel it, lasts seconds. Seconds, that's all. But with mysticism, it lasts hours. It's a beautiful thing to conserve the vibration that formerly lasted seconds. It's the greatest thing that one can achieve.

"But it's not something that happens by accident. You go to a natural place. You begin to feel something sweet in your mouth. Later the heat. Later a vibration that picks you up. Then you begin to feel that you're floating. And time doesn't exist, and nothing exists except



light. It's not a light that blinds you, it's a light that envelops you, that gathers you in. An energy as soft as velvet. In these moments you perceive another form of life, another reality. Mysticism fosters ecstasy. And ecstasy opens the door for you to another world in which you can see the universe in its totality; even more, you can understand it. You can open your hands and embrace everything. You're in communication with something superior; and if you ask it 'Does the universe have an end?' it says 'Yes.' At least, that's what I was told. I said, 'Where does it end?' It said, 'Where time is frozen, where time is congealed, that's where this universe has its end.'

"Once I was at a Sun Dance in the middle of incredible pain. Because you suffer a lot, hanging from that tree, twisting around. In your chest they make the wounds to hang you by pegs from the ropes, and you feel the skin ripping. All the way up to your head you feel the pain. Your blood drips down, and you feel immense pain that reaches your brain, you feel it like fire, and you see red. It's not true that you feel no pain. You feel it! Magnified! But you tolerate it, because it's your will to feel this sacrifice.

"So this one time, I was hanging there with this intense pain. And I was spinning around. I looked up, and, with the eagle wings that I held, one in each hand, I stabilized myself in the air, like an eagle flying. Then I looked at the sun, I looked right at the sun. And in a moment, the sun turned blue! The pain was gone, the sensation of hanging by the skin of my chest was gone, and I felt like I was flying, like an eagle. An enormous eagle, but an eagle. And I entered ecstasy. And I saw the blue sun explode. *Pshhhhh!* An enormous explosion. And something said to me that the whole universe had exploded. And I saw it expanding in a sphere, all the matter, and it was going at an enormous velocity. I was in the middle of the sphere, at the axis. I saw how everything was opening up on all sides at an unmeasurable velocity, and then it went away from me. Later it slowed down, little by little, little by little, until it stopped. There, far away, all the matter stopped and it converted to energy, converted to light. Someone said to me, 'What you're seeing is all the matter that exists in the universe; it's concentrating itself again.' And I was watching it, feeling this ecstasy, this beautiful vibration. In a moment the light formed into the shape of an enormous ring, and I saw it balancing itself in space. It shone like it was all made of diamonds, and the diamonds were suns, sparkling; millions and billions of suns glittering in this enormous ring of energy. And a voice said to me, 'This is your name.' That was the message. 'This is your name.' At that moment the ecstasy left me. I felt myself falling, I recovered my weight, and when I came to, I was on all fours on the ground. My skin had broken through. I had fallen from very high up in the tree. My friends were helping me stand up.

"That was a mystical experience. One that showed me the path and supports me to this day. Now I can enter into this state of ecstasy whenever I want to. I can feel the sensation, and it may last me minutes or hours, as long as I want, wherever I am. Travelling in an airplane, in a bus, when I'm eating, when I'm sleeping, when I'm bathing, whenever I want. I can concentrate and feel the sensation of ecstasy all over my body. This little heat that's so pleasant, it can last hours. It's like a prize, this weightless state. For me, it's a mysticism. For me it's an experience that I didn't look for, but that guided me to itself. The elements, the cosmic forces guided me. And I can be infinitely happy whenever I want to be.

"I feel that my mission, then, is to continue being that which I am. I don't know where I'm going. I don't want to know it. Although I could find out, I don't want to. My mission is to give encouragement and hope to the people around me. This, for me, is mysticism. These

are personal experiences that one can't share with others. I know other mystics, but they have other qualities, other experiences. They can come close, but they're not the same.

"The human being is capable of everything necessary to reach this state of mysticism. It's not yet time for everyone to do it. But in the future, more and more mutants are going to be born. They're going to be more sensitive. They're going to convert into mystics. Little by little, little by little, until the whole of the human race becomes mystical, until they become the superior beings of the future, the ones who will be capable of creating everything that they're capable of imagining. The cosmic concept of existence is to see that everything that exists forms part of a body, a universal body, which is the body of the creator. This, for me, is mysticism.

"Perhaps I can't make a scientific analysis of mysticism. But what I have said is my own experience. Consider it, then, as something personal. Thank you. *Ho.*"

During the question and answer session, Nezahualcoyotl said that he was holding a Sun Dance ceremony in Mexico in a few months and invited anyone in the audience to attend if they happened to be in the area.

N made sure he happened to be in the area. He flew to Mexico City and took a bus to Guadalajara. He had the telephone number of someone who knew where the ceremony was going to be held. He called him. The connection was bad and N's Spanish was worse. The other man kept repeating something like "ah hee hee."

N said, "What?"

"Ah hee hee. *Ah hee hee.*"

Finally he had him spell it out. A-J-I-J-I-C. It was the name of a small town, he gathered.

The next day at dusk he reached the base of the hill in Ajijic where the ceremony was. He walked up the steep trail, thrilled finally to be on ground that was consecrated for indigenous ceremonies. He felt he'd gotten home safely.

At the top he found a few dozen people bustling around in the twilight among cooking fires and tents. A Mexican guy a few years younger than him asked if he needed food or a place to sleep. He said yes to both, and the Mexican and his two younger brothers immediately found him a hot meal and a tipi with some free space in it. The four-day ceremony would begin the following morning.

The day dawned cool and gray. The Sun Dance area was a round, flat space with a wooden post in the middle. Nezahualcoyotl and the Sun Dancers appeared from where they had camped nearby. The shaman blew a long, clear note on a conch shell trumpet and spoke about Native American spirituality. Most of what he said went over N's head because he spoke in Spanish without an interpreter, but one detail was clear. N had been wondering about ayahuasca and the visions of snakes that it gives people. Nezahualcoyotl said that for the Native Americans, the snake was the symbol of the wisdom of the earth, and was considered to be a teacher. Only the Europeans with their Christianity demonized it.

N wondered again if his demons were teachers.

Nezahualcoyotl finished his speech with a *Ho!* and blew another note on his conch shell trumpet. The sun came out through a crack in the cloud. The dancers entered the circle.

They moved around the post in the middle under the hot sun to the beat of a big drum for most of the day. Four times that day they paused and went into the shade to smoke tobacco in pipes made of wood and stone. Then they would rest for some twenty minutes before resuming the dance.

The second day passed similarly.

On the third morning, one of the dancers underwent a flesh sacrifice. It wasn't as intense as Nezahualcoyotl had described. Apparently they did it differently in Mexico. Another man pierced the skin over the sacrificer's pectoral muscles and inserted wooden pegs. The pegs were attached to a rope that went over the post in the middle and then to a log on the other side. Two men picked up the log and ran with it so that the pegs burst out of the first dancer's chest. Moments later, an older dancer stationed nearby administered a red powder onto the two wounds.

This was repeated by other dancers that day and the next.

The spectators relaxed and talked with each other. There was a small contingent of gringos from Connecticut but they wanted nothing to do with the neophyte. N spent his time with the three brothers and with other Mexicans. He learned that Nezahualcoyotl had a kind of nemesis, a younger shaman named Carlos Cuitláhuac. Cuitláhuac had stolen Nezahualcoyotl's project to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas with the Journeys for Peace and Dignity, a dual-start relay run to be performed by indigenous people, leaving simultaneously from the northern coast of Alaska and the southern tip of Chile and meeting at the pyramids of Teotihuacan near Mexico City on October 12, 1992. Some devious, Machiavellian maneuvering had given Cuitláhuac control over the Journeys.

After the ceremony was over, the brothers brought him back to their home in Guadalajara, where he met their mother and sister, and was treated to savory and sweet *tamales* and paraded around the city in a vintage sky-blue Volkswagen Beetle.

Entering Mexico he had noticed an immediate alleviation of his stress. It felt like the web of energy that oppressed him was mostly specific to the USA. Much of his social awkwardness dropped away; whatever he did, people figured it wasn't because he was weird, but because he was a foreigner. And he felt appreciated for the fact that he had left the great, glorious, comfortable, wealthy North for a solo journey through the unsafe, impoverished South. He resolved to return to Mexico as soon as he had saved some more money.

When he got back home, he found that one cycle of family life had ended and another had begun: after a nineteen-year marriage, his stepfather Walter had left his mother, moving out of the house. Again his family was shattered. He was quietly enraged at Walter.

He continued living rent-free in his mother's basement. His mother took in borders. He landed a job as the invoice clerk of the textbook department of a university bookstore. A 9 to 5 desk job, just the thing he had wanted to avoid; but he knew he wouldn't get trapped in it, as he wasn't staying long. His boss took him around to meet his co-workers. In charge of medical reference books was a strikingly attractive and aloof Thai woman in her early 30s. Standing at a filing cabinet, Lily barely looked up when they were introduced. His mind performed the spontaneous arithmetic of subtracting her clothes and the bookstore and adding a jungle scene. The filing cabinet became a small waterfall. Over the next few months he learned she was fed up with her marriage. It wasn't a big secret. Filled with shame and joy, they started a lunchtime love affair in public spaces downtown where two moving bodies could be concealed. A few months after that, she left her husband and teenage son and moved in with his mother and him.

N's mother uncomplainingly accepted this still-married woman into her household, requiring only that Lily pay rent.



Involved with Lily, he was divided. Half of him was convinced that she was the one he was going to spend his life with, a conviction that came naturally whenever he fell in love. His other, more cynical half argued that he was using her as a placeholder for someone he might be in a steady relationship with in the future, as she was using him as a stepping stone to get out of her marriage. He hated the lack of self-control that had brought him into the relationship. But he loved to hold her.

He had one confrontation with her husband. The husband blamed Lily for what had happened, but he made sure to tell N, in no uncertain terms, "You have no morals." The words stung, though he reminded himself that in other areas of his life he did indeed have morals. He tried to use as little plastic as possible, he had done fundraising for Greenpeace during summers in Ann Arbor, Seattle, and Los Angeles, he didn't eat much meat, et cetera.

*But yeah, he reflected, it would be good if I could find a moral compass within myself. Learn the difference between right and wrong and stick to it. Because the way I am right now, I just don't know.*

One day N became convinced that there was a good chance that Lily's husband would get a pistol and shoot him in the head. He would see a flash of light, and the sidewalk spinning up at him, and that would be it.

*If I had more control over my sex drive, he thought, I wouldn't be at risk of getting murdered by jealous husbands. But I don't, so I am.*

When he flew to Mexico to begin his next journey in October 1992, Lily flew with him. They went to the pyramids of Teotihuacan to see the end of the Journeys for Peace and Dignity, and then to Cancun to snorkel and make love. Then they parted, she to finalize her divorce and go back to her job, and he to explore indigenous worldviews in Mexico and take an exploratory trip to Ecuador.

After Lily flew home, N traveled to a village in the mountains of central Mexico where Nezahualcoyotl was putting on a moon dance ceremony he had designed himself. Within a circle whose perimeter was delineated with four fires, nine women in long white dresses danced all night every night for four nights. N was put in charge of keeping one of the fires alive and spent long, quiet hours next to it, feeding it wood. A local boy kept him company, sometimes asking him about his homeland and learning words and phrases in English.

N stayed on in the village after the ceremony. His other companion was a man from the North like him. They were only English speakers present, and James relied on N to interpret for him. He told N he had recently relocated to Mexico because he was on the run from the FBI for destroying property while protesting coal mining on Black Mesa in Arizona. He was also one of the people authorized to carry a *chanupa* of the Lakota people, the wood and stone pipe that the Sun Dancers had smoked in Ajijic. He was half Arizona Indian and half Alaska Indian, he said, and he was a veteran of the 1973 Wounded Knee uprising, in which members of the American Indian Movement fought the US Army for 71 days.

After Wounded Knee, nine of the warriors went for a while to Cuba and then Libya to escape US government harassment. James met both Castro and Khadafy.

"What kind of government harassment?" N asked.

"Phone calls saying 'You're gonna die.' 'Watch your back.' 'Watch your car.' Out of the 380 warriors at Wounded Knee, only something like 90 are alive today. They tried to whack me in Oakland in 1978. They cut the brake cables of my car. But they whacked my wife instead of me. She was the next one who drove the car. I tracked down two of the three FBI agents that



did it. I got the drop on ‘em, put ‘em in a van, drove ‘em to a lake, had ‘em strip down to their shorts and swim out into the lake. Then I did target practice.”

N nodded, ingesting the information, wondering whether to believe it. James went on, “I cut off my wife’s braid before we buried her and I kept it. And I smoked the chanupa a lot by myself after that. We consider the chanupa as a telephone line to Tunkashila, the Great Spirit. I smoked it and I talked with Tunkashila and I cried.”

James and N went out every morning at dawn with a few of the villagers. The group would face Iztaccihuatl, the great snow-capped volcano that dominated the landscape beyond the pine forest. In the cold, pine-scented breeze, far from the noise of machines, the Native American outlaw would light the chanupa, puff on it, and speak solemn, joyful words. *Thank you, Great Spirit, for letting me live to see this day. Thank you for my life, for this moment, for my health, for the good people around me. Thank you for the earth and for the sun that give us what we need to live. The nature all around us, and all our relations, the four-legged people, the two-legged people, the ones with wings, the ones who crawl and the ones who fly. The animals that give us their meat and their milk. Great Spirit, please bless them all. And bless the humans, here and all over the world. Many of your children are sick today. Please help them find healing. Many of them are hungry. Please help them find food. Many of them are in prison. Please help them find freedom. Thank you, Great Spirit. Ho.*

Then he would pass the pipe to the others and share its fragrant, bitter smoke.

One night over dinner, James told N that he had participated in the Native American Church’s peyote ceremonies. “The tipi was the world’s first spaceship,” James asserted. “You can go anywhere in the universe with it.” The round windows of James’s glasses reflected candlelight and darkness. N told him he had decided to try to study to be a shaman. James responded, “Here’s what you have to pray if you want to be a shaman: ‘Great Spirit, please grant me a vision and the power to heal.’”

James asked N to stay around and interpret for him for a while. In return, he offered to teach him to hunt and to make totem poles. Afterwards, N wished many times that he had taken the Indian up on his offer, but he had places to go, concepts to investigate. The Mexicans in the village told him he had *pata de perro*, the paw of the dog—wanderlust. Specifically, at that point he wanted to visit Huichol Indians. The Huichols were famous for their visual art and for their shamanic traditions involving the peyote cactus. He had wanted to eat peyote since reading about it in Castaneda. He would try to use it to enter the spirit world, and to have something to compare the ayahuasca to, when he tried it later. So there was no time for hunting or totem poles.

He took his leave and rode a bus to Guadalajara and stayed with the family he had met at the Sun Dance the previous year. It turned out they were friends with a veterinarian who knew some of the Huichols up in the Sierra Madre Occidental, a region of dry hills north of Guadalajara. The veterinarian worked with their livestock, especially horses and cows. He gave N a letter of introduction to a local official. “This young man wishes to know your traditions,” he wrote. “Please treat him as if he were me.” The night before he left, the family stayed up late with him, talking. The moon was full, and they remarked that the Aztecs hadn’t seen a man in the moon, but a rabbit. They showed him how to see it, with its two ears clearly delineated in profile at the top of the disk. Later they prayed for him: that he might be successful in his quest for shamanic knowledge and that he might be safe along the way.

N headed off on a series of buses, up into the Sierra Madre Occidental for hours and

hours on dusty roads. He reached the town that the veterinarian knew and found the municipal meetinghouse. The official was out of town, he was told. With a shock, he learned that these Indians were not Huichols, but Coras, their less-colorful cousins. This would set back his quest. His face flushed and he thought angrily of the veterinarian for sending him here. A minute later he was able to joke sourly with himself, "That's life. Sometime you get Huichols, sometimes you get Coras." The Coras had shamans too, as he knew from his guidebook. But the tribe had become partly Christianized, and they used peyote only once a year, on Easter. Easter was many months away.

He didn't have any better leads, though, so he decided to stay here and try to find a Cora shaman to visit for a while. Maybe he could try peyote later.

As a local contact, the townspeople brought to him a 14-year-old named Hector. The boy had moved back to the village six months earlier after 12 years with his mother in Los Angeles. He talked with N about football and rap music and brought him home to stay in his father's house. Hector was nostalgic about Los Angeles, but all things considered, he liked the town better. It was *más tranquilo*, more relaxed. Before they all went to sleep, his father killed seven rats in the tiled roof with the flat of a machete. Then it was really tranquilo. Until N had to relieve himself in the middle of the night, groped his way outdoors in pitch darkness, fell into a ditch, and was suddenly surrounded by all the neighborhood's dogs loudly proclaiming that they had apprehended the world's tallest thief.

After a few days, Hector and N hitchhiked for several hours up into the hills until they reached a little village called El Nopal where they had been told a shaman lived. Above the village soared a high, steep hill. As soon as he saw the hill, he wanted to do an informal vision quest on it. When he was a kid he had always wanted to spend a few days alone in nature. On trips out west with his family he would see hilltops through the car window and want to meditate on them. Later he learned that some North American tribes had initiations for young men that involved praying and fasting alone in places like that. Maybe he could finally do that here. The whole area would be quiet and dark at night: it was off the electrical grid. Nezahualcoyotl's words echoed: "It's not that he looks for places of power, but that his own destiny takes him to them."

Searching for the shaman in El Nopal, Hector and N got the runaround for an hour or so before being brought back to where they had come from: the very first hut compound along the highway that went past the village. Directly across from the compound an immense boulder guarded the road. N and Hector were taken into a hut where a man in his 50s lay in a bed. A pair of handmade crutches leaned against one wall. The man was introduced as Tritemio Solís. To talk to the visitors, he pulled himself up into a sitting position using a loop of rope that dangled from a roof beam. He fixed N with eyes that were dark and critical. Like the eyes of a crow, N thought. In Spanish, he introduced himself and started in with the speech he had rehearsed.

"I'd like to stay here for a while if you'll let me. I'm going around learning about traditional healers. Later, I hope to go south to Ecuador and study with a shaman in the jungle. May I stay here for a while and learn about your traditions?"

"No."

"Please?"

"No, you can't stay here, it's not OK."

"I've come a long way and I have great respect for your traditions."

"No." The shaman shook his head.

"All right. Have a good day." N trudged out and plopped down on his backpack. Hector kicked the toe of his sneaker in the dust, wrinkled his nose, bared his teeth, stared at the horizon. He swung his arms behind him, stretched, then put his feet together and began to hop backwards chanting some hip hop song. From some pines nearby, a songbird warbled. Elsewhere, a goat *baaed* and then a rooster crowed. There were no vehicles going up or down the road that led back to Hector's village. The last one that had passed was the pickup truck that brought them here. N decided to make one last try. He went back to the doorway and said, "Sorry, I just want to try one more time. I'm really serious about these things. I'd like to go up on that hill above the village and fast for a few days and pray. I wouldn't make any trouble for you."

At the mention of fasting up on the hill, the shaman's face finally softened, and he nodded.

While Hector waited on a ride back to his village, he and N talked with Tritemio. N bought bottles of Coke for himself and Hector from the shaman. His one source of cash, Tritemio told them, was the soft drinks he sold to people passing up or down the road. He explained that his right leg was broken. Three days earlier, he had been the victim of a hit-and-run accident, struck from behind by a pickup truck and left unconscious at the side of the road. In the course of the conversation it emerged that six months earlier his wife had died of an unknown ailment in her head. But despite these two factors, he seemed very much at peace with himself and his world. He lived in five-room compound with two sons, a daughter-in-law, a grandson, and some cats, some dogs, and some chickens. N could stay in a tiny hut down the hill from his house, along with Tritemio's friend Jacinto, who was taking care of him.

Jacinto arrived in the evening. He was around the same age as Tritemio, and skinny like semi-wild dogs that roamed the village trying to steal tortillas. N shook his hand and moved in with him. Before going to sleep, Jacinto chanted in the Cora language by candlelight in front of a poster of the Virgin of Guadalupe. As he chanted, he gently agitated two wooden wands. Each was tipped with short brown and white feathers. At the end of each wand, where the feather tips were bound with red and green thread, two long brown and white feathers and one rattlesnake rattle dangled down.

When Jacinto finished, N asked him what the objects were.

"We call them *aná*. These feathers," he presented the long ones, "are from the tail of a hawk, and these," the short ones, "from the breast. These *cascabeles* are from rattlesnakes. You can't kill the animals to get them. The animals have to give them to you."

N stared at the objects, trying to believe him. The older man went on, "You look at these *aná*s and you think they're not intelligent, but they're more intelligent than you are. That's how it is." He paused. "By the way, you talk about studying shamanism. You should know that if you start, you can't stop without finishing it. If you don't complete the task, you'll be nailing the lid on your own coffin. That's just how it is."

With these words, Jacinto went to sleep on a bed that was made of ropes strung across a wooden frame and covered with mats. N brushed his teeth and then lay down on a mat on the floor, wearing a pair of jeans and a jacket, and wrapped in a *sarape* he had bought in Guadalajara—a blanket that has a hole in the middle so you can put your head through it and wear it as a coat—and in a couple of dusty blankets belonging to his host. Jacinto's hut had no door, just a metal barrel he had moved to block the bottom part of the doorway. The night was

very, very cold. Discomfort and tiredness fought over the young gringo until tiredness won.

The next morning, Tritemio's 11-year-old son Andrés showed N around the village and then took him out to the edge of it to cut some wood and bring it back for his father's fire. In the evening, Andrés's sister-in-law, who was about N's age, showed N how to remove all the dry kernels from an ear of corn with his thumbs. She provided him with a plastic bucket and a big pile of ears of corn. The fire cast a warm light and everyone was reserved but friendly, curious but respectful. When they spoke their own language N didn't know what they were saying. When they spoke Spanish he knew they were talking to him.

After he had been in the village for three days, Jacinto asked him for some money in return for staying at his place. "Give me three hundred dollars to start up a little store," he wheedled. "I'm already an old man, my wife died years ago, and I have no children. I have the paperwork in order, I just need to buy the stock. If I can open the store, I can find a wife and I won't have to live out my days alone and in poverty."

"I don't have three hundred dollars." N had two hundred in pesos and more in traveler's checks. "I can give you one hundred." He brought it out, hefted it.

His lips pressed together, his eyes on the horizon, Jacinto pocketed the bills without a word. The next day, Tritemio invited N to stay up in his house. He would share a room with Andrés. The boy had become his guide, his guard, his teacher and his apprentice. Andrés was in charge of telling N everything about the village and N was in charge of telling Andrés everything about the world beyond Mexico. N informed him of his transaction with Jacinto. The boy's eyes widened. "That's not his hut! That's his dad's hut! And yeah, he does have kids, they just don't like him."

The next time he ran into Jacinto, the older man said, to N's dismay, "One hundred dollars wasn't enough for me to buy stock for a store, so I spent it on irrigation equipment for my opium plants."

That day N, Andrés, and a neighbor in his 20s headed on foot across the dry hills toward a place where they could swim. After a desert hour they suddenly came to a deep canyon dense with vegetation where an ancient river wore through the earth. They descended an extraordinarily steep trail by clinging to bamboo stalks. Under the shelter of a cliff, just behind the sandy river bank, the neighbor had a garden of juvenile opium plants. He had to transport a coiled black hose he had borrowed back to the lender. That was the main purpose, N gathered, for their visit here. The swim was a cover story. Ever the good guest, he carried the hose on his shoulder part of the way down the riverbank, actively supporting the drug trade. It dawned on him that everyone around here was involved in opium cultivation. That must have explained some of Tritemio's initial reluctance to take him in.

Walking along the narrow riverbank beside the sheer cliff, Andrés and the neighbor spoke disparagingly of bandits.

"What do you mean, bandits?" N asked.

"Bandits," Andrés explained, "are people who steal other people's opium."

Overheated and dusty, the three of them finally swam in a vast bowl of stone formed by the river. It was fantastic. The only place it was possible to swim for miles around. To bathe up in the village, you had to squat next to a rivulet and pour water over yourself with a cup.

*To be continued in Cenacle | 83 | December 2012*

\* \* \* \* \*



*Martina Newberry*



## **Nor Ought but Love**

*If ever two were one, then surely we.*  
Anne Bradstreet

Her poem begins, “If ever two were one . . .”  
and so will mine.  
Your dark lashes on the back of my neck  
make the world lush  
and take away my years  
especially the wasted ones.

Your hands that touch me with minds of their own  
whisper *beauty*  
where there may or may not be any.  
Why would anyone  
want me? Still, you do, and so I walk backwards  
to meet you,  
to tie my overwhelming love into a bundle  
of sweetgrass to lay on your pillow.

When I dream of love, I dream of you.  
I rage at my body,  
this body you honor with affection.  
I rage at it  
and tear at my fears of waking from the dream  
that is you and me.

We are a contradiction, darling. We are the moons  
 of Jupiter and a dragon's tears.  
 We are love's leviathans. We don't have to be here  
 but here we are.

They think us foolish. They think me a fool because  
 my years don't equal my dreams.  
 They think you are a fool for being blind to  
 the pale vintage you love.  
 They see two fools whose ropey veins house  
 effervescent blood.

We have protection. The dead are looking out for us,  
 my darling, my You.  
 The dead tell us to inaugurate. They say,  
*Be the cult that you are. Be the poem*  
*and the poet, the cynosure, the penumbra.*  
*Be all of it. Be One.*

\* \* \*

## Blooms

My father helped Mister Hudson move his old fridge out to the garage and move the new one into the kitchen. Daddy worked at Kaiser Steel in Fontana shoveling slag and minding the Open Hearth. Mr. Hudson worked at Upland Savings and Loan. He wore a suit and a nasty face and he hated the neighborhood kids. But Daddy helped him anyway and turned down the five dollars he was offered, told old Hudson “Naah, we’re neighbors after all” and thanked him anyway. Second Avenue was old and shaded with big pepper trees. They shook at the slightest breeze, grew malformed fungi at the base of their trunks.

*The gritty winds came down  
from Mt. Baldy. The sand  
smelled like copper, gleamed  
like copper.*

On Saturday, when Daddy’s friends came to visit with their permed floozies in tow—Andy Kushner with “Penny” and Bob Trow with “Brenda”—they all got loose on beers and shots of Old Crow and Daddy told about moving Hudson’s fridge. Andy Kushner pinched his girl’s cheek with a thumb and a forefinger knobbed as tree twigs, kissed the red spot and said, “It won’t make the old bastard any friendlier, Jack.” “Why sure it will,” Daddy said, “he can’t get any damned UNfriendlier” and everybody laughed like crazy. The room filled with cigarette smoke and the flexing of calloused hands and the smell of Evening in Paris perfume. Brenda’s stockings, brand new from Sears Roebuck, got a run in them and she cried a little. Everyone went out onto the front porch and looked up.

*The sky glowed like the night  
was on fire and maybe it was  
and the sounds and colors  
of the mill split the sky.*

This all happened a good 20 years before the mill closed and the skies above Fontana and Rialto and Etiwanda went blue and maybe even clean. Before I went off to college, we drove—my father and I—to the closed-up mill and the deserted shells of the machine shops and the blast furnaces and the empty soaking pits where only the ghosts of ingots lay cooling. We went right up to where he used to work—the locks on the gates weren’t locked.

It all looked cold and unfriendly like old Mr. Hudson’s face. *It was such dirty work, such hard work* I said, but my father said, “Naah. I was grateful because it gave us a living.” On the way home, we passed Dominic’s Bar, closed as well. All the men had drunk there and stayed too late there and left their lunch pails there and left their smelted dreams there at one time or another.



*Walking out of the mill,  
the men grinned, faces so dirty  
their teeth looked whitewashed  
fierce in the gloaming.*

*Walking into Dominic's  
Beer tasting of hops and grime  
hard-boiled eggs, sausage  
out of jars, into steel fists.*

*I wish we could go here again, I said. I wish I was still 9 years old and Momma and I could meet you at Dominic's after work and I would have a hard-boiled egg and a sip of your beer and a Shirley Temple for myself. I wish Dominic's never closed.* My father said, "Me too," and flexed his fingers. Dominic's sign was falling off the building, my father tried to fix it. I saw Andy Kushner trying to help him. They couldn't get it fastened back up.

A week later, I was on my way to San Jose State College, wanted to be a librarian and a writer. My father hugged me hard, told me, "You're the daughter of a working man, a steel worker. Be proud of that." I wasn't proud right then, but I got proud some 25 years later when an elitist bitch told me I couldn't write worth a tinker's damn because I didn't have a degree. I got proud then and told her about my father and told her she ought to be slapped, but not to worry because I wasn't into slapping and I left her class and didn't go back.

*In my dreams, my father  
glides over hot rolled blooms  
and billets. His shovel makes  
sparks that bounce off his grin.*

*The alarm sounds and the door  
goes up to show the molten river  
red as blood and hot enough  
to rival hell.*

*My father guides that river  
right out into the sky where  
the stars drink of it  
and continue to shine.*

\* \* \* \* \*

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Joe Coleman



## The WRATH of DOLORES TOODLE

Dolores Toodle  
(the mastermind behind that daring market caper . . . )  
was taken aback to read this report in her local village paper:

*Three brazen felons masquerading as elderly types Friday last successfully burgled McIsaac's Grocery, leaving its patrons aghast. The perpetrators are believed to belong to a troublesome teenage band that chooses to rampage in old lady guise for reasons we don't understand. In addition to sundries and pantry items, a satchel of cash and a Bentley were listed as stolen. Nobody was hurt. The constable states, "Evidently there are the same wicked juveniles who punctured the tires of a lorry on Cavendish Street not a week ago."*

Dolores remembered that story.

\*\*\*

Dolores Toodle, tho' semi-daft and a bit of a (*sorry*) dumb bunny, gradually came to consider the question of who took the stolen money.

Dolores Toodle, larcenous, sly (but tuppence short of a shilling),  
angrily dialed her neighbor:

"Millie, somebody made a killing . . .

whereas all we scored was something to drink plus a couple of bites to eat!

A charlatan played us for doddering fools!

Our heist is incomplete!

I'll not be the butt of such mockery," Dolores declared, irate,  
"and until I have fathomed the bottom of this, the Savings and Trust must wait."

\*\*\*

Millie, however, was ossified, having belted too much liquor  
 the previous evening—  
 out on the town—  
 with a Church of England vicar.

So Dolores range Bridie.  
 She tried several times in vain.  
 She could not reach her—  
 for Bridie was otherwise occupied with an amorous Anglican preacher.

\*\*\*

Then Dolores decided that, all on her own, she'd retrieve what she knew was her due.  
 Already she harbored a sneaking suspicious she hoped to establish as true.  
 "Sweet Jaysus, Redeemer," Dolores petitioned, "be Thou my Strength and Protector."  
 She flew like an octogenarian arrow.  
 No obstacle would deflect her.  
 Arthritis aside, she was undeterred and arrived at her destination.  
 She rapped on the door.  
 The stockboy appeared all a'tremble with trepidation.

For a moment they stood toe-to-toe. Eye to eye.  
 Neither moving or making a sound.  
 She faced him—smiling.  
 Then Toodle let fly the rage of Dolores, unbound:  
 "I know you, stockboy—you're Jeremy Carr—son of the Deputy Registrar.  
 What a slimy, greedy scoundrel you are.  
 You dipped your hand in the cookie jar!  
 Why, I ought to turn you over my knee . . .  
*I pulled the McIsaac robbery and all of the loot is belongin' to me!*"  
 She continued assaulting him verbally:  
 "You villainous rotter! You pimply git!  
 You bloomin' blighter! You treacherous twit!  
 You lump of lard! You pint of spit! You shameless, sneaky, sniveling shit!



(JEREMY FEARED SHE MEANT )  
HARM...

You bloody prat! You spotty knob! You steaming turd! You snotty gob!  
 You feckless lout! You wanking sod!  
 You cheeky rogue! I'M THE WRATH OF GOD!  
 I'll slap you silly, you excrement!  
 I'll thrash your back end, from Dover to Kent!  
 You'll be wonderin' where your testicles went!  
 I WANT THAT MONEY TO PAY THE RENT!  
 Or I'll gouge out your eyes and beat you blind!  
 I'll break your leg—your arm!  
 I'll rip off your ears, if I'm so inclined . . . ”  
 (Jeremy feared she meant harm . . . )  
 I'll pinch your cheeks—I'll tickle you numb, and then I'll find an umbrella  
 and perhaps I'll ram it up your bum and open it up, young fella!”

\*\*\*

Defenseless against such vile invective, poor Jeremy fetched the take.  
 Dolores relented, satisfied. “Very well, lad, I'll cut you a break.”  
 But as she was leaving the home of the Carrs, Dolores was heard to say:  
 “By the way, would you like to go out on a date—just you and me—this Saturday?  
 We could soap some windows—graffiti some walls—  
 We could even set small fires—  
 or vandalize property—deflower gardens . . .  
 Do you like to puncture tired?”

\*\*\*

*Aging with grace is a load of twaddle.*  
*Balderdash, bollocks, and bunk . . .*  
*A Golden Ager is not too old to be an obnoxious punk.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



# Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

## Part Seven

*"There is no final answer."*  
—Dr. Timothy Leary,  
Radio Interview, 1986.

*viii.*

"Tender each other" was Global Wall's new message, the one he'd not known he'd been reaching toward all these years, the one he'd arrived & overwhelmed him. It was a series of experiences that had not connected to each other until the most recent of them.

It wasn't just his soul that had smelled funny all those years back. His body had smelled too & he never knew why. Why would a washed & cleaned & healthy young body still smell bad to others? Why? Eventually it went away, so far away, the distance maturity & money collaborated to bring. His scent had been so extinguished that there were dim rooms he entered quietly, so quietly, that the absence of a scent seemed to shroud him almost invisibly.

So the moment back then, the first of them, the series, began walking down a school hallway past a group of chattering girls, one of whom he'd call in fear & lust, panic & puppy love, the night before, they'd spoken a few minutes before she had to go, quickly.

"Don't call her anymore" smacked him as he walked by, hard to believe they hadn't all said it. He did not slow or hurry & they didn't pause in their chatter, but it had happened & one could ask: that's all? But if one did, one has either forgotten what those early brainwashing years were like, or lucked strangely through them. Or perhaps did the calling of such things.

Yes, anyway, a first thing in a series. Not the world finally destroyed in & of itself. No. If another person, maybe, or if a different narrative to follow. If this, if that, it doesn't matter. This boy was this boy & that phone call had meant everything to him. A kind of first & last.

Tries to sort out the angles of it all later. Put roughly, he thereafter felt marked.

*(Not that there wasn't revenge, there was of course, years later when he'd become Global Wall he had his man find the girl who'd let her pack crush him instead of giving him the least kindness of saying no herself, & she'd become matronly & divorced both, & he discovered her daughter blooming as she had, & blooming, & untouched, still hypnotized by her mother's hatred of men, & Global had used every resource to watch her, it became an obsession, his man would later say it turned his operation from dabbling to serious, because they figured the many details of spying upon someone, closely, how to invisibly infiltrate a life, & when Global was ready the mission moved in closer, he took the lead himself of luring & turning her, it wasn't difficult, it almost never was, he edged into*

*the girl's life, casually but steadily, let her take the wheel he was preparing her all along to take, seduce him, this older rogue poet dark rebel cartoon he'd created in her mind, let her lure with her conscious charms & those she stumbled into discovering he liked, & when the moment came to possess her, open the door & let the beast in, the woman who had gouged him first & therefore deepest was drugged to a helpless clarity, bound to a chair before a video screen as he let her beg & moan & crawl over him, sucked him down again & again, mounted him with bared teeth arched back & perfect ass for his claiming & she came again & again & again—but most importantly was that as she came the video monitor showed an amalgam of her crying face & a photograph of the boy who had called her, the girl crying for more, & a whispered instruction & she moaned the words "Don't call her again, Don't call her again, Don't call her again, Don't call her again, o fucking godddd that feels so fucking good—"*

*(But two things—first is the girl never forgot him & is even now looking to claim him again & he does not know this—*

*(And the second—fucking this girl was not the finale but the prelude—the new obsession with going back & changing that moment, that very moment, did someone write here that that moment wasn't all? How to say this? It was & wasn't, equally & both, he didn't want to possess the girl she'd once been, he wanted to undo the wound—*

*("You would not call?" asked his man. "I would." "Then how different? "That moment in the hall, her among her pack." "You'd say something?" "I'd say everything." "What, specifically?" Silence. "I don't know." His man nodded. "Wasn't what you did enough?" "No, it wasn't." "Is anything enough?" "I don't know."*

*(Reflecting now, Global realizes that in the moments he had merged with his younger self, he need only have said, "Don't call her" & he might not have returned a failure. Perhaps not at all.)*

"Tender each other" was Global Wall's new message, the one he'd not known he'd been reaching toward all these years, the one he'd arrived & overwhelmed him, & within that new message was an old one, "some things you keep close so they won't explode & kill you." From the man he'd met so long ago, in the invisible dimension down a city alley, the man who'd warned him of the Beast beneath the bricks, who he'd compelled to make an unwanted phone call, who he'd seen break before his eyes as the phone in the poorfolks cafeteria rang & rang—

He'd kept his thing too close, this man, & it had exploded, but it had done worse than kill him. It had let him live.

I didn't abandon him, though he was now a crumpled man, mortal, old, slowly dying.

I left home, what was left of it, & took to living with him & taking care of him. It wasn't really a long time but he taught me how to do most of what I did later. When he was ready to move along, he directed me to bring him to & leave him in the White Woods.

I laid him down there against a tree & he told me a final story, a story to keep close, one of power, *on certain conjured nights, there is a marsh of glass where no marsh should be, & one may find a path to walk through it, where no path is sensible, & the test is to brush by the orange & green & yellow & blue plants waving in an ocean of air, sidestep the carnivorous large balls, begin until they are touched, to reach what none remembers or knows or believes is in some sense the Beast's mate or partner, giant orange & yellow & red & green creature; a wild thing that sings forever as the Beast is silent, & they are almost always as far as can be—*

Told me to move closer & fucking *listen*, memorize my fucking words, *she if she be, rains down purple spears of her glass on the woods & some will prick logs & stick, while the rest will melt in the earth as though nothing other than simple rain.*

*The Beast will push the speared logs together, messages, patterns, songs to her?*

Now he was obviously gone, passed, but he continued telling. *Once the Beast & his partner danced in a courtyard, they were artists & lovers, there was a night, they danced in a cafe, & she sang in his ear & he still hears this song & it drives him & drives him*—————

“Tender each other” he says now, now back to lecturing in halls, no need to talk of unpublished book to come, no, no want to anymore, none of that matters, only the words matter, as they always did, as he’d forgotten but now remembered, *the words, hunger, ah, yes, the words, yes*—————

the middle one—dark-haired—pushed forward at last from among the sweet carnal screech of the eldest & the dark mystical fuckery of the youngest—

yes—she made one request—a guitar—so simple—walking afternoon through another imaginary small town & she sees a little music store & smiles at him & asks for the guitar in the window—they go in—

she sits on a stool & begins to strum, to play, to play really well, the store owner listens, smiling at first, then not so much—there is something in this playing that is witchly beautiful—

“What is your name?”

“It’s Sarah”

“Where did you learn to play like that?”

Sarah smiles & shakes her head. Plays a minute more then looks up at Global & hands him the guitar, as though to put it back on its sales stand.

Stiffly, in pain, he doesn’t.

He offers the store owner a price, doesn’t notice it’s about a third of what’s on the price tag. The owner nods, now thoroughly spooked.

Sarah plays for long periods of time, then doesn’t, seems almost to forget she ever did or knew how.

Sarah told a stranger her name.

Sarah broke a basic rule.

Sarah now takes her turn at the leash on Global Wall.

One motel they stay at has a pool. The two others show disinterest but Sarah insists Global take her swimming. Her suit he can’t remember buying is yellow, a one piece, her hair is down, she swims close to him, very close, if anyone was watching but none are & she closes in on him—

*breathe for me, breathe slower, now come under with me, good, deeper, breathe, good, come with me, hold me there & there, don’t let go! deeper & deeper, good here we are now listen close*

Sarah sings into him, far deep into him, his own words, *tender each other*, over & over, her yellow swimsuit is gone & deep beneath the water she slips in him & through him, his



breath becoming groan as she slips deeper through him singing his words until he panics & lost, cries, waves wildly toward the surface miles up & she holds him while he cries & says *touch & touch & touch, please, yes, there, oh, & oh*, they rise from miles below, she is so deep in him still, singing, singing, *tender each other, tender each other, tender each other*,

“tender each other” he says again, stalking through his audience that fears to look at him directly, “*tender each other!*” he cries & whispers as though these are the remaining words to his tongue, & his girls have perhaps raised or reduced him to this state, the words, there are these & all the rest, *tender each other*, so simple, so simple, so tight, so deep in him, *ahhhhhhhh*

ix.

The how is keep moving. The why is both full moon & unknown. Why the S&G, the apartment above it, near downtown of a crumbling factory town, a state college a mile away, lotta poor folks everywhere? How did this place & the ships overhead mix together?

Well, one thing was that Jack had gone to school in that city, years ago, had he met her there? Dig, dig into it, something there, there had been a party, years ago, dig back, before the ships, before the weird increased—what—*ahh*—yes—

they were sitting cross-legged facing each other, about to set on each other’s lips a pretty little fragment of blotter paper, LSD-25, yes & she had smiled & said, “the weird will increase” just like that, & his glimpse of her tongue, *oh, yes, sure, how couldn’t it?*

they would go to movies together, eat their way slowly through a sheet of blotter acid, gift from someone she knew, & they would go to movies & it wasn’t the Nada Theater & yet & yet—

They didn’t kiss for the longest time, kept the Beast contained between them, he had other ideas for a long while, she had to come along

her reedy voice came to him in his dreams, singing, wordless or a tongue so foreign he could not know it—

she dated other men, if it could ever be said they were themselves dating—what was it?

That first night, how & where that crosslegged sitting? A house off campus, a sort of ministry & hippie hangout—something & chase it—

A party—many people, teachers, students, strange others, there was some impetus & here it was, & did they meet there? Penelope did not go to school there, how was she there?

“I was there to find you, recruit you” she told him later.

“Seduce me?”

“Yes. But you wouldn’t. Not even close. I’d told them you wouldn’t, not if we ate acid together. Eventually, maybe, but not then. And by then they’d lost me to you.”

“Lost?”

“I was yours. I’d turned.”

Had Jack eaten acid before that night? She’d never been sure. There were unknown things about him. Guesses.

“Did they burn it down?”

“I think so. It was a message to me. Nobody was hurt but it was to show what they could do.”

“And we rebuilt it. You turned on them & we rebuilt it.”

There’s always more to this.

*x.*

All I can say is that when we walked together into that apartment above the S&G Pizza, its rooms empty, quiet, & our ideas so different, & as yet unshared, for why we were there, what there to do, I was simply happy, Penelope, I let my heart spill through those rooms like a flood, spill & climb & wash the walls of that place, & I was simply happy, that place, that hour—

*xi.*

“Charlie”

“Charlie”

“Charlie Pigeonfoot! Wake up! It’s Jack! Cmon, man. Penny’s waiting downstairs for us.”

Charlie rouses but it isn’t Jack, & it isn’t then, & he isn’t who he was at that moment, not young but far younger, he’d fallen in with a ragged number of people who were smiling & confident & hopeful & a bit despairing too when they thought too much about the ships overhead, what it was said they could do—

He returns to the reverie come over him again because he is sick again & wherever it is, it’s quiet here & the reverie envelopes best in the quiet

the poppies, the poplars this time, those poppies he would see even in waking sometimes, those poplars every waking tree he saw seemed to wish to—

he had no body yet he moved fast & easily, steered, left, right, higher, lower, within, sometimes deep within the eye of a crow, the petal of one of those poppies, branched multiply in a leaf, sometimes many of them, these reveries had happened to me since he was a kid, nobody but his teacher whatever she was knew about them, he looked merely asleep, though the sharper eye would think he more looked dead—

If lucky he would make it to the pond with its water lilies, its strange noises not animal nor insect, this was deeper, this was stranger, he was, strangely, more singular here, not bodied, but not able to branch & multiply, it happened more rarely, when the malady really shook him down deep, there was no land nor sky to be seen, & the watery surface was, he knew by testing it multiple times, hard as deep ice, the lilies burned to his touch so he drifted above them,



listening, unknowing—

“Charlie! Charlie Pigeonfoot! Penny says she’ll haul you out of there by your ear! We will miss the start of the movie!”

Eventually to the haystack field, & now he knew he was close, he’d lived here once for months when he’d been very sick, they said it didn’t seem he’d ever wake up—why would he? He’d found them, they lived behind the wheatstacks, they danced & sang & seemed to do nothing else, they drank a strange brew & invited him to join them, lie back, feel the sky descend—ships overhead, when he’d been told later of them, didn’t frighten him in the least—they offered him the gypsy girl he most wanted among them, she was ready to remove her scarf, it was red, beautiful, more so when she wore it, its function & its due both manifest wrapped around her head or neck, no, he couldn’t, he wanted to, he couldn’t, she gave him the scarf, when he moved on, it was the scarf he gave to the Beast, in the shape of a man, who touched it into the shape of a bonnet & gave it to his—& what did any of this mean?

Jack comes back up to where Charlie lies twisted under a table. Says nothing at first.

“Charlie.”

Nothing.

“Charlie!”

Still.

“I’ll get Penny.”

A hand on his head. The only one that had ever reached through & beheld him. But when she did this, he knew her as Christina.

“Tell me, Charlie. Where you him again?”

“No. Maybe.”

“Why, Christina?”

“It helps. You know I can help.”

“He thinks he’s going to die. He’s on a boat, near port, but it’s on fire, its sinking, something is wrong.”

“Go on.”

“He’s a man of reason. Books. Science.”

“Yes. I know.”

“He reads the latest journals. He writes letters to colleagues.”

“Yes.”

“But he’d dreamed of choking on sea-water. Often. And maybe that’s why he took this sea voyage to Europe. It was an indulgence, a whim. And returning he watched the moon get brighter every night.”

“Fuller?”

“Yes. No. Brighter. That’s his word. And he had the dream of choking on sea-water every night on the return trip. And here they are, in sight of land, & sinking. He sees people on shore, tiny figures. And there’s a lighthouse too. But they aren’t close enough. Not enough lifeboats to get everyone back safe.”

"Can't they swim, doggy paddle, something?"

"Maybe. No. Sharks? Swells? I don't know. The waves too strong? I don't know, Christina, but he thinks, he is sure, he is going to die, in sight of land. With the brightest moon he's seen. He's sad. He's very sad."

Silence.

"Is there more?"

"Well then it's more me but he's not dead. He survived but not whole. He's deeply traumatized. We take to each other."

"Take? This is new."

"It's hard to sort it. I only try to explain it like this to you."

"The poppies again too? The poplars?"

"The gypsies? The girl? Yes."

"You mix it up, Charlie."

"Not on purpose."

"No."

"We have to go."

"Why do only I know you as Christina?"

"I don't know why you know at all. I didn't tell you."

"Why doesn't Jack know? You love him."

"It's like this story you try to tell me. Tangled & hard."

"We have to go, Christina."

They nod at the same time.

"You love Jack."

"Yes."

"You're sure?"

"Yes. Why?"

"There's someone else. Gone but not."

She starts but catches herself, squelches herself. Stands, offers him a hand up.

"We'll talk some more later. I promise."

[We haven't yet, Christina. Not since that night. The lightbulb. **RemoteLand**. We still need to talk more]

*xii.*

I don't know yet I rise & stand & move along. My body breathes & beats & a thousand other things I know & do not think constant of. My eyes see, how? Blink to stay moist, how?

*"Everything outside us is mad  
as the mist & snow"*

The world remains as I near & retreat it. Places I've been, not been, seen in a picture, in words, not at all, change, change, change, change

*yet still the world*  
*still the world*  
*still*

And I am telling you because you do not know that our very origins are not entirely from here  
 & if you could but see the ships overhead as I do, you would then know this too—

They've always been overhead, & among us, & within us, & our history is a growing, willful  
 amnesia from the truth; we belong to this world & this world belongs to the universe—

We are not blind, we are not asleep.  
 We are unwilling, & I could blame  
 the centuries-long powerful among  
 us but I will not.

For always there is choice to see more or less, there is always a choice to heed all waking &  
 sleeping, there are clues & signs everywhere—

Some do, I suppose, they try

“And you?”

Me?

“Do you see near & far or just the first?”

My vision tries to drag me far—

blinks, looks, looks—I follow  
 intermittently————

Follow & sometimes it's backward, way backwards, my mind walks me backwards over a lot  
 of years in an instant, imperfectly, oh yah a fuck lot of years my mind hurries, imperfectly, the  
 path back is a dark one, *no* stars above, or a scant few—

Not blind, not asleep, but groping, again this hard moment & no tool to fix, none, just walk  
 through it & watch it play out, so near, yet not, watch it play through again—*oh*

Blind then?—yes

Blind now?—still

I wish I could communicate here to these people I am now among, having coming all this way  
 just a word—

*Which word?* I wonder over the years—*which moment?*—there are several possible but this is  
 almost 30 years to the evening I might choose when I sat with you after your party, sat with  
 you, in your bedroom, & you wondered what it would be like if we dated—

This moment still haunts my dreams & bones—for sure it was a turn in the road for all grief & happiness that came——

I never forgave me you no, it seemed to confirm the worst in me, the least, that I might be worthy of benign company but not a girl's love. No, that was for someone else. Prettier, cleaner, something. And I wanted to understand. *Why I could not be loved. What was wrong with me.*

I learned, a little late, that there's no answer will satisfy that. I compelled better of myself, better & better, & not just to raise my stakes but others too. Not just my boat raised, but many of them, all of them.

What you are too little to give me I will spend a lifetime creating in other ways, I will seek to salve & heal & teach & compensate for the pain I now know nobody escapes, none, we each & all rise, move, fall—

we each all are mapless—

yearning the long twine of the common & the fluted hour—

In dreams I still chase you & know it's my youth, other roads, word not said, or wrongly said, or its many failed variations—

Trying to conjure to your person in that long gone year, what but sweetness, what I felt in you, anyone but myself, I felt low, I yearned to something else, something beautiful, or at least clean, & tonight, these many years later, I see the struggling vistas of human drama deeper, there is no peace but in melody & rhythm, no calm, no quiet but free movement—

I wish I had been your first, & you mine, & that grappling moment had been ours, but I suppose I've spent it out in other ways since, in what I wasn't able, I've transformed it, over & over, until I became more than I was, I sought to comfort & heal deeply where I could, & oppose the bastards everywhere, & it traces back through this night, when we sit together on this bed & you wondered about us as a romantic couple, & I know I spent years trying to get with you to the possibilities of this night, long I'm sure after you'd been had, better or worse, still I chased this night with you, its other path, the door it opened to me that I could not seem to do on my own—

& I couldn't. I've learned that. I can do this, I can fill these pages with my hand & pen, & my force, but no human moves in vacuum, I learned that what I do moves within a we I can be better in concert with & find myself not lesser but greater for it—I can play with my range of ideas better for there being a world beyond me—I did not know this 30 years ago, now, as I sit here with you, I am alone, I am inventing a world but not knowing I can kin myself to others, not knowing I am not alone & you are not my only possibility—I loved you as I had not before or since & I realize now you were just too overwhelmed—it was so much easier to be in control & that's what you preferred—control—what I had & offered was something else & you would not go there, not yet, not with me, ever? I don't know.

Did I forgive you? Do I? It's 30 years on. Do I forgive you for rejecting me or me for being rejected?

I don't know. I could have persuaded you as the later man I became, or walked away sooner if nothing came of it.

Was it parents, the opinions of others? Were you that simple & stupid in the end? Why not. Life then & there did not present a lot of options for living.

You couldn't see what I'd become, & maybe I became who I am in part because of your rejection.

So a thank you? Is that possible? Is it not? I stumble saying & thinking it. Would I be something else if you had loved me? Or, really, if you had fucked me?

Was it love or sex? I think it was *possession*, the exclusive attention of your mind & body, that's what I sought, what you could not give to me as I wished—

So what then, the years, the dreams that still come, what?

I don't think it ends, & I don't think you're much involved in it anymore, not now, not long since, I think then matters for what it was, but more for how I grew from it, hard, & hurt, & stronger, & a less gentle person, but more empathetic, kinder

And there were others since who drew me that near, that open, but it's funny that I don't dream of them much, not like you, not like I will always of you.

Goodbye, again. And hello, hereon.

*xiii.*

The way is called Dis-illusion & hark & spit & wonder new at this idea, what remains when all illusions are snuffed? A deep empty forest, a long blowing desert, the nameless roar of the ocean?

Some would say all is illusion in this world & thus Dis-illusion is to part it completely. As though life not even a game but a trick, a web to escape through cease—

Me, I walk around & do not see a world that tricks by its illusions of reality, tho men & their works & their faiths might be said to resemble self-made or hustling illusions—but it's the not knowing why, & the dread underpinning of every path in its sure fini—

The way is called Dis-illusion, maybe some other angle on it, maybe one doesn't have to arrive in the box below or blowing in the breeze—

Maybe some illusions can be rendered otherwise——

Now turn around & look back in & see what's going on there—

Maya looks at me, smirking.

I write again:





*Everything is possible  
 Anything is likely  
 Regret best fuels a pause  
 Hope is good traction to act  
 What stays, its food infinitely varies  
 What should happen—*

“Stop”  
 Why?  
 “You wrote that already”  
 Yes.  
 “So why again?”  
 To see how it feels now. How it changes as I change, reading it now, writing these words again—  
 “And?”  
 OK, I guess.  
 “What then?”  
 What now?  
 “Yes.”  
 I usually don’t know.  
 She looks at me anew with her fierce blue eyes.  
 I don’t.  
 “So what do you do?”  
 We’ve had this conversation before.  
 “What do you do?”  
 I summoned you to argue with me about what next.  
 She laughs.  
 “And?”  
 I don’t know. I wait. I wonder.  
 I write old lines til I break them off—  
 “And?”  
 It hits or doesn’t.  
 She nods.  
 I can’t tell you how or why. I can only say do & do & do again & see what happens—  
 “I’m not like you”  
 We both know that.  
 “I don’t know what to do about it.”  
 I do. Let’s get you to Wytner.

Wytner is not what it was seemed. One arrives there going elsewhere, & not doing it very well. It is a safe place but it won’t easily let go. Wytner disputes the remain of the world, doubts & would do without if could. Wytner is not angry but often grim. Wytner is the Beast or not quite, the basis for *Trip Town* but no I suppose not really. There’s more to say but Wytner might I didn’t rather.

I don't know Wytner very well in some ways. But Maya is bound there with Samantha & Dean & would not arrive if I hadn't willed it some.

Dean nods & looks at me.

"I dream about you. You'll get us there."

It's not hard.

Samantha doesn't know if she likes me.

"You write first."

Yah.

"Go then."

Yes, it's in the White Woods, I know that much in the center of a desert in the depths of the White Woods—

Samantha nods. Dissatisfied.

"Time is crooked here."

Now she agrees.

Now Maya's gaining my attention.

"Crooked?"

Yes. I suppose that's right.

"And?"

Well it means the path here isn't direct.

"Then how did we get here?"

Dean points at me with a backwards thumb as they pass me & I recede.

"Him."

OK, Maya, you're here.

*xiv.*

First thing Maya does, even before what could be called doing precisely, is sniff. Just one & then she knows but it's more like something before knowing. She's here in Wytner but she never left, exactly, my words for her in this less than a moment too long because I want to say now is that here the ships overhead are exactly overhead & what's more here is where they *load* & *unload*, & possibly land & rise, I do not know & so here is a kind of central point, a crux—

"Oh" she says.

Nods, shakes her head.

Falls back suddenly into the arms of a big gentle figure who says only: "Easy." His guitar is nearby to comfort, instruct, whatever may.

"Thank you for catching me," she says, suddenly girl & shy.

"My pleasure, miss."

"I'm Maya."

The musician smiles. "I think you're expected. I was, too, it turns out."

"You were?"

He nods, smiles, twinkling blues eyes. "Different reasons, of course."

Maya can't get her bearings yet, here in Wytner. She's standing OK now, but fuzzy in mind. Unsure, but fuzzy in mind. Unsure, unsure. Was this it? And what now?

She closes her eyes & listens, raises one hand slightly & the world around her pauses, oh, what is that, & what is that?

Call it the velvet blindness of music, what keeps coming when companion, blood, & bones are spent & gone. Oh yes, she sways, listening now, it's coming from several directions, ready to take & taking, oh yes now

Finding the world mapless, I've walked my years. Mapless but, so many pointing fingers, I've swung one way & another. Mapless, a game? Is that possible or would it? I am still swaying & willing to know. *I am still*—

The musician has started his playing again, his welcome to Wytner for Maya & her friends new come. He was glad to be playing again & felt that he'd not stop soon again. No.

Friends. Where?

"My friends?"

"Which?"

"Dean & Samantha. I came with them."

The musician looks around uncertainly. "It's not a big town. Maybe they're looking around."

Unconsoled, Maya looks him deeply & bluntly. "I think I am here to get something important done. But I can't without my friends. I want you to help me."

Engaged, he nods. "I think I was waiting for you, Maya. I wasn't sure. But I think so now."

"What's your name?"

"Jim. Jim Reality. I died not long ago & came here."

"Does that make this a place of the dead?"

"I don't think it works like that. I don't think I ever thought that. I know I'm not where I was, & this isn't the body I possessed. This isn't my old guitar. But here I am, & you came."

"How will you help?"

He raised his guitar. "It's easy to get lost in Wytner."

"You said it's small."

He starts strumming. "Let's find your friends, Maya."

She nods.

He strums some more. "Think about them now. What they are like. How they make you feel."

She thinks & follows him. Thinks: Samantha, her dearest friend, loves her, does not know what she is, but loves her & feels protected by her. And the sea. Their connection, somehow, but what?

Dean: the old man she'd found at that restaurant. Something to him, so much of it not yet, & that dream of fucking him too.

This wasn't helping. Maya looks up & the murk lets up & Jim is still a little spectral but a man, a big man but gentle & his strumming comes from his heart & his humor & she has already kept him going forward & so this farmhouse is what she sees. Several buildings & all strange. Clover-dale.

That's what the sign says, Clover-dale, & it sort of looks like a run-down farm, yes, yes but yes isn't the word that fits as she walks closer with Jim ambling along nearby & strumming to the moment—was? yes, suppose so—isn't? No more but now like never was? Effaced. Maya doesn't usually struggle with words so.

She stops, still arriving, not there, still on the cracked paved road leading to it, still not there. This seems important, like every step is somehow more bluntly definite here in Wytner than anywhere else—

Look—study—grasp—

A main building, a couple of barns, another building across the weedy fields—

All painted red—now fiercely faded. The main building's front & side doors have broken steps, half-opened doors, detritus within—the nearer, larger barn isn't completely upright, glassless windows, but the smaller one behind it is pretty fully tumbled—

Hmm—what?—just hmm—

"They're in there?"

"That's where our song is leading us, Maya"

"Our song?"

"Your thoughts, my playing. We're following the path of our song"

Maya looks completely at Jim for a moment, as though struck new with a deep memory. He smiles, blue eyes twinkle, then he resumes playing, eyes nearly closed, yet he easily moves along near her—

She nods, not knowing, but nods.

They move on. Their song continues.

*"All the worlds burn tonight"* is what is written low next to the half hanging open door side entrance to Clover-dale's main building & Maya nods as she picks her way up the broken stairs to this door, reads in passing as she enters through the door into the first cluttered room within—

This room hasn't been entered from outside in years. The air is stiff. Dust upon piled up detritus is solid, indifferent to life or movement—

Jim has not followed her in. Maya knew that too. He played her to the door & that was where the song ended. Her friends were in Clover-dale. He'd brought her here. Here was less about resisting & more about learning its how—

xv.

*A touch & all melts—  
Everything remains, in scatters, little deny, little solve, yet it all remains—  
The world takes back what you borrowed, call a life—*

Yes, all this & more, Maya steps into the first room in Clover-dale's main building, solid dust & all, yes, yes, & turns to her right & sees—

mirrors—many of them—she's in some of them, not in others—she's different looking in a few—not like funhouse mirrors—no fun in these exactly—but yes, different looking, not simply older or younger but as though a different set of results had brought her here—

OK—what then this—it's tricks,  
Maya thinks, & looks at me—

“Tricks”

I suppose.

“Is that all this is?”

I don't suppose that.

“What then?”

I'm not sure of Clover-dale.

“Are they here?”

Dean & Samantha?

“Yes”

Everyone's here, Maya. This place is a maw.

“A trap?”

No. Not exactly.

“What then?”

This is where you have to play it straightest & truest. When you know, you know. When you don't, don't pretend.

“How does that help?”

Clover-dale feeds it back, whatever it is. It doesn't know it's a building. You are within & it looks a way, but that's now how it is. That's like spots on a beast. Protective coloring.

“And?”

You leave when & how Clover-dale lets. But you leave with a gift if you do. A sort of blessing. It's how best I can say this.

Maya nods, sees I've spent my best explain.

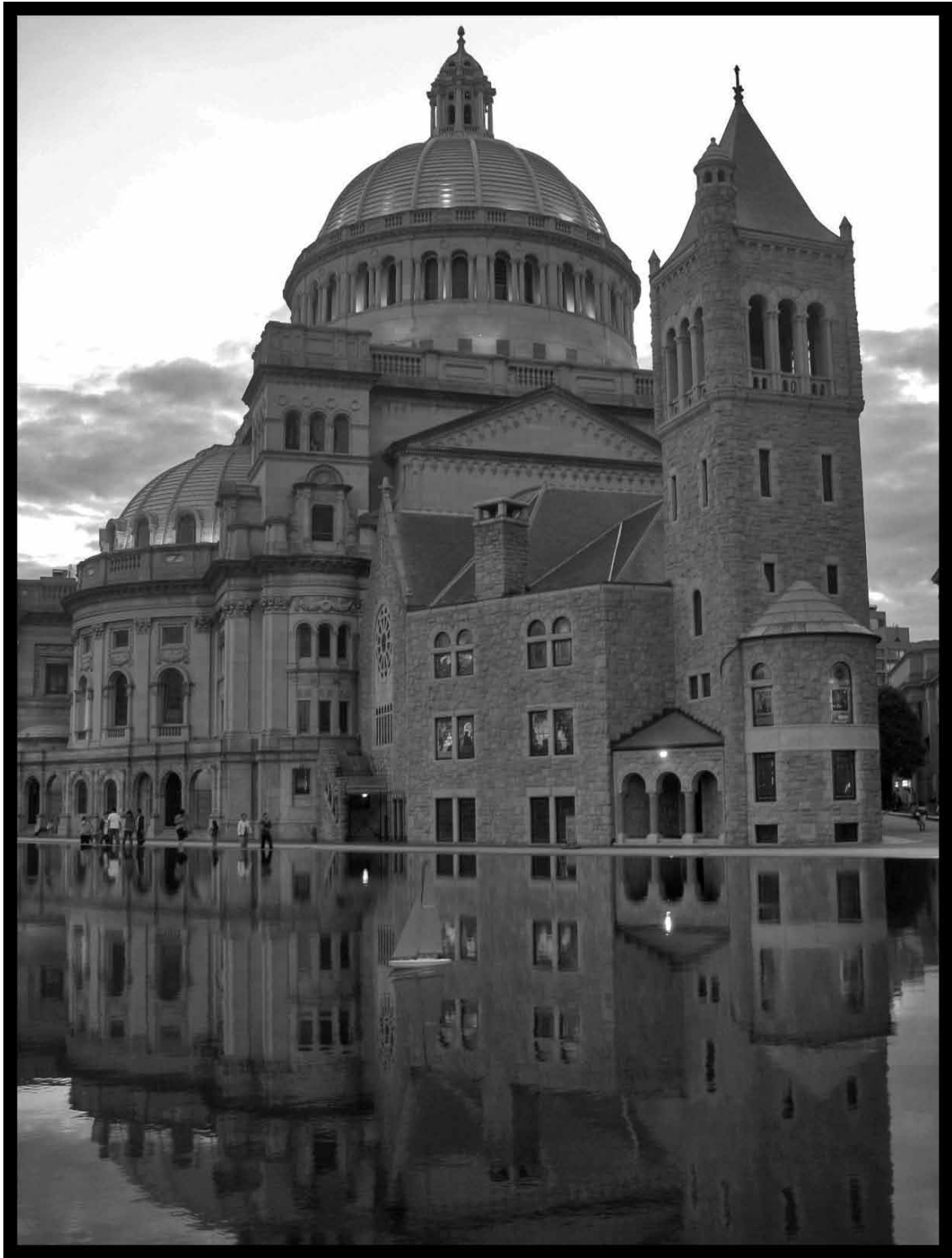
I begin to fade off but she shakes her head. Takes my hand.

“For now. For a bit.”

I nod OK.

She looks again at the mirrors but then shakes them off. Like the dust. Coloring. Spots on a beast.

She moves toward the next room & I follow mostly.



The waters are deep, she stands on the edge for a moment. Looking within, seeing little. Her blue eyes are wet.

Maya.

“Just undress me. Now. Quickly. Don’t talk. Please.”

I pull off her tie-dye Jimi Hendrix t-shirt. Her white bra. She turns to face me, nods me look down see. We smile, despite all this. I continue, unbutton her jeans, draw them down, she stops out. Shivering. “Do it. Now.” A finger on her white panties, tug, & she’s nude.

We contemplate this for a long moment. The she turns & in a moment dives in, is better than gone. I wonder, yet to know.

*xvi.*

The golden thread of music through this labyrinthine life toward its center likely to discover no center at all—

Yes but still I follow this golden thread of music along my pages & years alike, wondering what do I do with any of it?

Maya swims deeper & deeper, this time no hesitancy, no question, she swims toward, with knowing, with questions, with what she has, this is Clover-dale, play it straight & true  
how would she otherwise?

Her heart is young but her intents aren’t always simple. She loves in more than one direction. And if this is where she’s from? What she both is & isn’t *form*. She can no more sort this than anyone could.

*Samantha.*

*Samantha*

*Samantha, I know you are near.*

*I’m here, Maya.*

*I’m going back.*

*It’s not your world.*

*I don’t care.*

*It’s not your choice. I can only protect you here anymore.*

*It is my choice. Samantha.*

*I wish I could help.*

*I know. I love you too.*

*Will I see you again?*

*Samantha?*

She is shivering in my arms as I am dressing her. I am both holding her & dressing her but she is wet & weak. Finally I get her all tucked in.



"Thank you."

Yes.

"Next room?"

I don't know. It depends as much on Clover-dale as it does on you.

She smiles at me & I'm undone again. I nod. She moves on, releasing my hand.

*(Follow the golden thread, Maya. It's all I can offer you.)*

*xvi.*

Find deepest good in the ferment, say that, wonder that, if maybe that, words, some words, these words, those words, I spoke those words, or wrote them, some years ago, on a page now old but I can still point to it, the page, those words, find deepest good in the ferment, where a hand claws lawless for its want's sup, the world still inventing itself but less violence when the thin structures of rule & order collapse, deepest ferment where happiness and tragedy are even better than a new word aresomixtured that there can be no reaction distinct from any other oh each of us saw it as a baby, the ferment was all, not interior or exterior but all, that moment plunged in the ocean before kicking & waving about, returning sense of up there & down below, deepest ferment, *o lovely*, what a shitty thing to say toward it & yet true but that wrong too, no center to break nor edge to run over yes better but not too much—

we're sitting together now, in this cafe, angled coffee joint of sorts, Maya & I are sitting together & she is composed again, her version of this book in front of her & she is writing as I am, her pen moving as mine is but she is not watching me, just starting & stopping as I do though I can't know her words & this is pretty funny really—

So I talk. "I don't know if it's necessarily choose here or where down there you're from. That is to say, I'm not sure."

She talks while still writing & I write down what she says not knowing if that's what she writes down too. "I'm not done here."

"Does that mean you'll go when you are done?"

"It just means I'm not done. I don't more than that to say."

"Does talking to me help?"

She writes the following in lieu of answers: *"I will say six things now about this place. 1) It sells coffee & pastries, salads & sandwiches. 2) Its clientele ranges from the rich, often foreigners & academics, to the poor, often homeless. The former sign their bills slowly; the latter count change in dirty cups. 3) Its indoor of many arrayed tables is complemented by an outdoors courtyard now empty in the winter's night. 4) Some people, often students, stay here for hours on end, at their books & computers. 5) There are deliberately exposed heating pipes & lighting apparatuses. 6) In the reflection of the long front window, the interior lights & exterior streetlamps seem to mix."*

Satisfied, somehow, she closes her manuscript & looks at me calmly.

“Done?”

“For now.”

“Tell me more.”

“You’re sitting us together here in Cambridge—though I am still in Clover-dale—to make a point.”

I don’t nod.

“I have to find Dean & Samantha.”

“She left you.”

“She never leaves me now.”

“Jim brought you to Clover-dale.”

“And you don’t know much more about it than I do.”

“I know some for sure.”

“Can I read?”

I turn my manuscript towards her & find the pages about Christina. She scans. She nods.

“Now we cross. Again.”

I nod.

*xvii.*

Maybe I’d known Xtina longer than I like to remember. I’d always figured it was just a type of girl, her rope knotted up from fine ass, a few good books, a peculiar lunacy so bound deep in her that you could shred her to marrow & bone & that smile would remain, the one that had caught you, you’d thought she was looking past to someone you loathed for receiving it but it was you. And yet never quite you. Ever fucking on, you felt often enough there had been or would be that someone, a ghost unforgettable or due very soon—

Penelope saw you in my eyes from the beginning, I think began partitioning herself thusly from that first cross-legged acid tripping night—

So a simple personality split, is that all Xtina is? Ah no. But maybe. But part of it is no, Penelope isn’t Xtina, or wasn’t previously, she was recruited to win Jack’s favor to the cause she had joined & then she’d fallen in love with him, & yet I wonder if that is enough to tell what was between them—

Just tell one thing.

Penelope lied her way into the cause. She was younger than she said & she’d run away from her hometown & everything she’d known—

She found out about the ships overhead afterward—

“I talked my way in. I knew something was going on. I knew my smile could get me further in & if I unbuttoned my sweater some.” I looked closer in your eyes & wondered what you were seeing. Her again?

I'm trying to make you focus by confessing all this stuff I'm not suppose to say & you are seeing Xtina in me & I think this is never going to end we are cross-legged in this room in this house party but none of this between you & me is ever going to end including this Xtina thing I try to look deeper in your eyes to find her as you are doing the same with me—

Had I known you too, Xtina? Maybe, but I think you were Christina then & it wasn't long. We traveled a lot, my father & me, I always thought he was in the military but I never saw him wear a uniform. I always thought my mother died young, & was way younger than him but maybe because we had one framed picture of her, looking about 20 or so—my father—so kind & so distant—he raised me by a proxy of nannies & sitters, I felt his love for me with the words to taste softly in my heart, or keep when he was long gone—my father would read to me from economics journals like they were Grimm but he seemed to be getting at something—& science magazines—& some weird philosophical books too—I still dream the words—meeting a man like Jack was inevitable—

We lived in New England for a very little while, Vermont, it was June when we moved there & late August when we left—I never even went to a day of school there—

But there were meetings we went to—strange, crooked people with sober smiles & probing eyes—

She was the other older girl there—we were teenagers, I guess, & we served the coffee & small cookies. Horrible, all of it, not to be enjoyed.

We looked I guess alike, I think a few noticed it—both about 5'4 or 5'5, green eyes, blonde. But she was striking & I wasn't. I can't explain this, it isn't modesty. I was barely her shadow in that strange farmhouse we would drive up to on Sunday nights—

Christina, if I'm right, was the host's step-daughter. She wore plain clothes, they didn't fit her well, she was quiet, focused on her task. We weren't chums.

I wanted to be jealous of her. She had brothers, or step-brothers, who oozed around her from the shadows & didn't realize I was there. Her step-father watched her from every side of his misshapen old head, guarding her, possessing her, both, neither, *I wanted to be very jealous*. But the feeling died in me as I watched her face. She was trapped there. I felt it in my belly. We rarely spoke but I felt how careful her movements were, practiced to produce no excess. Did we never speak? Now I'm not sure.

Anyway, it wasn't about us, these gatherings. It was about the book the adults gathered around, the one I once got close enough to see wasn't in English.

We weren't let in for the event itself. We were ushered out of the room & directed to a sort of family room with no television. Told to keep silent. My father always made sure I had a book. I loved him, I ached for him as only an only daughter of an aged widower could, but fuck if I didn't love him more on these nights, the moment they were done & he came & got me. I didn't like the farmhouse & its strange mirrors & Christina troubled me most of all. Her scent. I can't say—

But I did listen once—I used a chance mention to my father that I wasn't feeling well & might need the bathroom. He nodded, I was told. During the event, I told Christina I needed the bathroom, get up & went to it without waiting her comment or assent. Closed the

family room door behind me, took off my shoes & slid to the meeting room door for just a minute—I had to—

I heard voices, but mostly one voice. Reading? How would I know. He spoke in—click-clicks & noise-noises—like an insect but not—humans don't speak like this—I don't think we can—yet he did—

Words after. Phrases—“feed the old demons a killing plate of machine & reason”—“Men will ever rage & recede like their gods, & most will fall unhearing the celestial hums”—there was more but I had counted to thirty in my head & slid down the dank hallway to the bathroom, went in, flushed, ran the water, wrinkled a hand-towel a bit, & returned, shoes on, composed, to Christina's sly silent glance, & my book.

Was it Christina? Did I know her name? Did any of this happen?

I would not be able to say for sure but the phrase “celestial hums”—because that was the phrase that occurred to me the night I was finally allowed to see & board the ships overhead—I had never heard before what was audible, & visible to me. I still hear shades of it & it still calls me home, as it did that night, but I have chosen you, Jack, & that is not ever going to change. Whoever I have to be, *whatever, I have chosen you.*

*xviii.*

I leave him behind to enter the next room in Clover-dale, my manuscript is in my paisley shoulder-bag but I know he writes this one when I don't & this is reassuring. Now my hunt here is for Samantha & Dean, my dearest, & for Christina, who I don't remember at all, but it seems I helped her. And yet—

When I read his manuscript about her escaping Clover-dale, I really didn't think it was me doing all that. It sounded like she got Samantha's help in Samantha's way of helping too.

So I think: these people mix. How do I find the crossing point?

The next room is dark but full of people. One is talking & the rest are silent, listening. I edge inside, listen too.

“Did you see those clouds today, bubbling like eager flesh? Damned pretty, like a girl in lipstick & yellow skirt. You know what I mean?” The crowd laughs, murmurs, there is a happiness here—then the lights come on—

Oh, it's a bar, a crowded bar full of people not a lot older than me. I shouldn't be here but—

I'm with Jamie—& Muddy. And Muddy's date, a girl who'd taken one look at the dress Jamie made me wear—too low cut, too short, half-tight, half-loose—& hated me. I don't care because I can see why. Jamie & Muddy are trading mental notes on me. *Have you? . . . not yet but mmm . . . yah, man, that's some sweet pink flesh . . . wanna share? . . . I don't think so . . . Why not? aww . . . you got your own, she's not too bad! . . . yours is prime, ready to be pumped! . . . like that*

If that girl was smart, she would have seen I was no threat, that I could use a friend—no, no luck in any of it—I'd been staying with Jamie a week, tonight, this bar I wasn't old



enough for, this dress I didn't fit, they were him making his move—

He grabs my arm as I move for the next door—

“Where—?”

“The next room”

“What?” It's loud again. Perfume & cell-phones, baseball caps & thongs under short skirts.

I push into him—“I'm leaving. I have someone to find.”

“Who?” His grip tightens.

“Take your hand off me now.” This isn't how it went. I stayed & let the thing get half-groping before I stopped it.

He doesn't. I see Muddy watching, smiling. He'll try to fuck me too just to see Jamie's cock in it all. His girlfriend isn't visible nearby.

I think. “Jamie. This is Clover-dale.”

“I know,” he says like I'm stupid. I look up. Sign over the back of the bar. Clover-dale's. Great. It has a sense of humor.

Finally, I do what girls other than me usually do. I collapse & there is local panic. Jamie backs off, as I knew he would. Several people crouch over me. I twist away & half-crawl through the crowd—stand up, only exit is the front one—I make for it, out, & turn right to get away.

Is the night street the same room or the next? I am walking slightly uphill, heavy traffic, lots of people on sidewalk, car wash, McDonald's, bar, another bar, then I come to—

Shit—the place I met Dean—I think Dylan & I talked there too—but it is & isn't this time—

& the poor girl in denim rags, her hair tailing around her shoulders, straw-colored, that dog with her a pretty underfed husky—

She's pretty, I come closer, green eyes—

She's—Christina?

I crouch with her, pet her dog who sniffs me but no growl.

“Hi.”

“Um, hi.”

“I'm Maya. Do you remember me?”

She's drawing on a cigarette, again.

“Should I?”

“It was a long time ago. You lived on a farm.”

She nods, casual, but not really.

“My dad & I would visit. You had . . . brothers. And your own dad. We came for them to have meetings. You & I sat in another room.”

She draws again. Non-committal still.

“Were you looking for me?”

“I'm not sure. What about you?”

“What?”

“Why are you back in Clover-dale?”

She looks around, startled. Stands.

“No. Me & Kinley were . . .”

“Who?”

“Kinley. Kinley!” She’s panicked but then an older guy steps out of the restaurant with bags of food. Her look is a rush up to him but she holds still.

He looks at me friendly in my stupid half-ass party dress but his look remains calm. I like him.

“Why didn’t you tell me we were here?” She’s mad.

“Where?”

“Clover-dale!”

“We’re not. We’re not even close.”

“This is *Maya*, Kinley.”

Now his look gropes but not for fun. For realness.

I nod, uncertain.

“You’re Maya?”

I nod.

His face jerks a little then he smiles simple & true. “I’m Kinley. You saved my Christina back then so I’m your friend if you need one.”

Christina’s look at him twists, & then settles. There is something I can’t understand between them, like half their conversation is telepathy, too.

“This is Clover-dale” he repeats more calmly.

I nod.

“But it’s a farm.”

“Sort of.”

We sit on the curb in front of the store, Kinley distributes tacos & burritos & sodas to us. I sit on one end, Kinley the other. Whatever I am, she’s not sharing him.

It takes awhile to sort out how we got here. “A farm house?” Christina smiles at me. I nod. “Near a town in the middle of a desert inside the White Woods.” I shrug. “I’m here to find my friends but I’m not sure how all of this works.”

Kinley laughs. “I’ve been trying to figure this out for a long time. Christina & I got here another way which doesn’t jibe with your story. But that is part of this.” He stops there.

Christina nods & resumes. “Look up there,” pointing further along the boulevard which seems eventually to ascend into the sky. “We came from there. There weren’t stores & cars. It’s like we traveled through centuries to get here.” She stops & nudges Kinley to continue.

Maya is amused by how they interact. Funny, jostling but a deep rooted love in their eyes. It occurs to her that they don’t so much care where they are—it’s silly & romantic & she feels glad & jealous.

“We were in someone’s dream for awhile,” Kinley says. Christina nods.

It occurs to Maya before he tells that that she’s painfully glad they’re with her.

I notice Christina’s dog has wandered off but neither move to call him back. Kinley tells the story but lowers his voice & I lean in to hear. Christina half-embraces me & my good feeling gains, I think will stay awhile with them. I think: stupidly & truly: *we are more together*.

Once they knew they had to get to Clover-dale, Kinley felt that driving there was irrelevant. “It’s not on the map,” he said though Christina knew it was in Vermont.

She was reluctant to leave their hotel room. Convinced him to stay one more night, strike out early. He saw no sense in this until she started undressing before him. Started.

“Kinley, help.”

“Christina”

“We’re going to do this if I have to get some rope to tie you down & some cock pills to ready you up.”

He nodded. What man had ever shook her off once she was down to black bra & thong?

They hadn’t before, at least literally, & she hadn’t in awhile. Had he? Why would he have come back for her if another one was feeding him well?

She tries thinking less as he joins her on the bed, sitting behind her, his hands reaching around her for her bra hooks. Undoes them, pauses.

“Why, Kinley?”

“Why?”

“Why did you come back for me?”

“I never left you, in my heart. I just lost you awhile.”

Strangely, these words heat her deeply.

“Tell me more. But keep going.”

He leans away to turn out the room’s light. The curtains are dark crimson & thick & only a corona of light at the edges shows through. Her bra unhooked, cups apart, he holds her breasts gently & talks.

“I haven’t taught in a long while.”

Her tummy jerks, but it’s nice.

“Say my name”

“Christina” he slides her bra off & turns her part way around to him .

“Again.”

“Christina” ever softer they are now in a tight embrace, almost a dancing couple’s pose.

“Say yours”

“Kinley”

“Again”

“Kinley”

“Now say Kinley loves Christina”

“Kinley loves Christina”

“Again”

“Kinley loves Christina”

“Over & over”

“Kinley loves Christina loves Kinley loves Christina” *fall back, tangle close* “loves Kinley loves Christina loves” *he snaps her thong off in several pieces, her body shakes* “Kinley loves Christina loves Kinley” *somehow his shorts & shirt are off & he drives deep in her she howls soundlessly* “loves Christina loves Kinley loves Christina” *does things to her that no man, no person has ever done* “loves Kinley loves Christina” *swabs her body new with finger & tongue & kiss all the while in her ears* “loves Kinley loves Christina loves Kinley loves Christina” *& he steers her to a cumming like her first long ago, it was at Clover-dale, that first letter, that first hot bath, neither the farmer nor his begging boys home* “loves Kinley loves Christina loves Kinley” *& this cumming is like that cumming & they close & connect & through all those since & for a clear-eyed moment she*



*sees everything from then to now makes sense “love Christina loves Kinley loves Christina” & his deep idea to propel them straight to Clover-dale would have worked had he known of the knock at the door that came as she was, the middle boy not his intention sees her in tub, legs wide apart, fingers touching & grindings, lips snarling open, breasts heaving (& he has never forgotten & she has not either but differently, wishing at times before Kinley came back that she had invited him in instead of barking him out & pulling the curtain & splashing in frustration & stymie) & so the not-completed orgasm throws them toward Clover-dale, but off, dangerously off—*

“We found ourselves on a grassy hill looking toward a sloping road in the distance. It was loud because there were people walking down that road firing guns. Near the bottom of the road, huddled here & there, were people firing back. Soon, there were four of them left, boys really, firing & laughing—

“The people in the grass moved suddenly toward an overgrown cemetery joining others in hurriedly setting it on fire—There was a machine gun by itself, firing & firing—

“Then it was all gone & a voice in our heads soothing us, saying again & again ‘let it go, let it go, let it go’—”

Christina finishes. “We were up that hill & kept walking till we got here & stopped to get food. That dog came up—”

“The man”

“Yes, we both felt it. He got us to you.”

They stop.

I nod. Christina’s blonde hair is lighter than mine & in the glaring sunset glows. I nod, a hint. Would twitch my pink nose but say instead. “Dean & Samantha are nearby.”

“How do you know?”

“I have another friend. A White Bunny.”

*xix.*

Did you wonder, Bowie, how it was they let you have me as long as we stayed there on the farm?

It was me, the one you didn’t know, I didn’t tell. There was one moment but you shook it off—

My hands tied above me, my feet barely touching the ground to balance, your cock so deep in me from behind I couldn’t . . . fucking . . . think . . . when I moaned “more, harder” & I suddenly came to & began a sort of fake girlish whimper to whelm the words & I don’t think he heard & he certainly didn’t know that nobody had expected me to return after the trouble I’d left in, nor did Bowie see what a fractured place it was, unable to return to old way, unable to accept me as the new minister—

Did he know how many cameras watched him fuck me? How many starving eyes jerked back & forth with his every thrust in me?

Did they know what he was? A man-shaped force, brought to me with deep tides of fury & emptiness, spent *down* to the apocalyptic fucking they witnessed with all their orifices open & limbs stiff & loose?

Nobody asked me where Oliver was & Bowie would hardly have recognized him, what we did was that deep & lasting—

"You can't bring him there, Christa"

"I have to. I think he's what heals the rifts. I bring him & he & I—"

"No."

"Would you rather I jumped the bridge?"

"Christa—"

"He can't know what I am—"

"How?"

"You & I tonight. When he gets back with food—"

"Christa—"

"Then you leave for Seattle. Take a cab to the bus station downtown. Go & don't look back, Oliver."

It was part dream, part smoke, part kinkier sex than she or Oliver had ever tried before—not dirty, just complex—stupid way to put it—

Oliver bound us—all three of us—there was no choice—even now I feel him—needing, protecting—

& Bowie knows—he *knows*—but right now deep in his undermind alone—when, if, the three of us are together again—in body, in dream, in smoke—he will remember—

I hope it doesn't happen, I hope Oliver is with his boy & far forever—

Sometimes none of this makes sense—but it's how I ended up in this woman's bed tonight, trying to explain it all—

She nodded once or twice, sipped her wine, we shared a pipe—old enough to be—but her body tight & her face so beautiful—I wanted—I would—we did—

Funny—she fell asleep in my arms—exhausted from coupling in a way I never get—a half-smile, easy breathing—I put on the radio—a man preaching—I would have switched but I didn't—came on in the middle—carefully I stuffed the pipe full of fresh hashish & listened in & out of smoke—& thought of Bowie

Me, Bowie, Oliver

Me, Bowie, Gretta

Oliver's boy too?

*"Why did that man cry out & run? those long ago days, the so much more fertile youth of this kind—fewer answers, fewer questions—yet both starting to come on—oh yes there was greed in men's hearts even then—the poison of **mine**—**my** land, **my** weapon, **my** bitch's pussy who alone **I may fuck**—what crack in evolving human consciousness made us choose I over we? How did it happen? How?"*

Christ fades into the smoke & senses Oliver with her, his ragged, ironic smile, his tangled blonde hair, the various tastes of him—he had never with a girl, she had never been with a guy, & they did with Bowie—

*"What cries in privatest hours wills each most to run! Do you know? Can you deny? Will you see? Nod & know & walk into commonest hours with this knowledge no longer cloaked behind your mask!"*

Christa relaxes more, her fingers down below, touch, slide stroke, *mm, nice, talk to me, preacha' man—*



*"Start again, you say, go slowly this time. Talk me through this one step at a time—*

*"Once, some say, there was common purpose, when there were fewer. The men killed the beasts, the women cooked the food & bore the children—"*

*Yah, ah, h, you've seen where I come from, the farm, commune, cult, whatever, the bare truths of it when the pretty smoke & costumes drifted off—*

*"Myths explained the suffering, what life gave, what it took & why it took more—"*

*Now a few wet fingers on my nipple the left one, always liked it better for this, but you're not getting me to the point—get me there—**get me home**—*

*"If myths ever explained true, why did that man cry out & run?"*

*Yes, ah. MMM. **Fuck.** OK, a small one, but still. Try again, gimme gimme.*

*"Something, blood, sunshine, pleasures without words in private hours"*

*Now, yes. Now move in.*

*"Something, the disappointment in his laughing father's voice. The press of teachers to believe them, blindly, hungrily, believe like a slave in the mirror would. But those private pleasures, touching, the voices—"*

*Now she is all over Gretta again who responds half awake to her touch, her movement,*

*"He ran, & was not seen again, a lesson, a warning, that what cries in privatest hours wills each most to run"*

*She relaxes, & Gretta does too.*

*"Now listen closely to me, if you're going to hear anything from my lips tonight. Hear this.*

*"What life does not give—*

*"What cannot be taken—*

*"What outreaches coins—*

*"Staying moonlight, youth, weightless want—*

*"Myths breathe by men who believe, & expire when the last one falls."*

*They fall asleep together as the preacher talks on & on & on (Global Wall in a locked radio station, the time paid for & the overnight engineer sent on his way with something extra to enjoy his evening & his girls with Global every step of this way, choosing Sarah among them tonight she is strumming her new guitar as he is hunched at the microphone turned away from her, strumming very softly, he doesn't even hear music, turns & the pink strap of her bra under her tank top, fallen partway off her shoulder, oh, strumming & he cannot hear the music, pink strip part fallen, oh, the shadow of her pink cheek, keep talking into the microphone, it's paid for "a slow revolution bides the world beneath the mathematics, the wine, the sham gurus with hallucinatory songs of end dates," pink strap, strumming, oh, where are the other two, strap, oh, shoulder "slow revolution" "Touch a thing, call it a name, feel the power coming on, know it limitless," she is strumming deeper, oh, no strap, what strap, never was a strap, what would I withhold from you? "& you won't stop now, you'll never want to stop. Now again."*

*A crush of jaws, of grunts*

*"There is no center to break*

*nor edge to run over"*

*No strap. None. Breaths hard,*

*open & open more, please enjoy*

*it please **enjoy me***

*"There are two temples.*

*"There is the temple to joy.*

*"There is the temple to sorrow.*

*"Between them bides the human heart." Enjoy me. Pink strap. No pink strap. Nothing withheld. Oh. Oh. It's not enough. Still talking. Still talking & talking. "Only two temples. To joy, to sorrow."*

*Pink strap. None. **Oh.***

xx.

"When did it matter the most?

When I smiled at another & *believed.*"

Some are telling that **RemoteLand** isn't a film anymore, hasn't been for awhile, maybe never was one.

But they're showing it tonight, here in the Noah Hotel, no less, opening up the old theater many didn't know it had, *oh yes, back when, those shiny nights, so many & so long ago, not a few ghosts still & a screen unbelievably tall & RemoteLand will be on at midnight, though some say it's not a film nor ever was—*

Where is this, man?

We're ushers, go with it.

I don't understand. What the fuck are ushers?

It means we don't have to go ever.

We *don't*, man. Is that what we want?

"When did it matter the most?"

"When I smiled at another & *believed.*"

*The theater is impossibly large but that may be because of the tall mirrors, the several great chandeliers, the way the balconies are angled to seem to fall away by the thousands*

How did we *end* up here though?

It doesn't matter, does it?

Where's that guy. Charlie, the funny last name.

Pigeonfeet.

Yah. Where's he? He looked worse off than us.

He's OK. He's somewhere around here. I think he brought us.

How? I don't fucking remember! Do you?

"No. Not exactly. But yah he was talking about something & then we were here & it sorta makes sense to me"

"What the fuck are you talking about, man?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure. But yah. We're here. We're us here. It's good."

"You don't know, do you?"

No. But yah, it's OK. Here we are. Just relax. We got jobs. It'll be good now. I promise.

xxi.

*Out there, up there, in here, sate the paradox & win the game. Ha ha. Like, yah.*

I looked up there, those nights, what Preacher called the weaker hours when I met him those years later but, yes, there was a me before him, & I thought the stars were trying to tell, I really did think this—

I felt it in those years, not attached to a man & his dream, maybe his dream's mania, I felt it looking up, worlds without end, something beyond hours & miles, something that did not notice these simple human ideas, but like me this something loved the night & wished me *not to be afraid*—

I felt my edges, felt how they hemmed me in, these borders dividing me from all, & I tried again & again to fell them, *fell* seemed the right word, I was trapped in the woods of my mind & didn't know how to get out—

Was it you also that night, nearing me as you neared her, dreaming me as I dreamed you first, you showed me the way out eventually, which is why I cling so, Preacher, why she clung to him or you—

I was old enough to drink in bars, loosen up enough to fuck who came with me, but that was all, old enough. I let others decide what I found good-looking, how I dressed, how I responded to the talk—

I had little ideas, about edges & borders, & strange things that loved the night & wished me not to be afraid, but the colorful booze soothed these into my breathing, *calm Genny calm Genny calm Genny* so I just did what was possible until—

The fucking never went right. Some men found me pretty & wanted to hurt it out of me, take a piece with them. Some confused things, let their cocks fall in love with me, forgetting cocks *do not love*, they want—

I learned—I dressed for it—tits on display, wet lips, tightly slung ass—learned & did nothing with my learning—it wasn't fun after awhile, it was habit—

I had a few things in my bag, things you wouldn't think of me—mace, a jackknife, but also a small gun, unloaded, I'd never fired it—but for different reasons shown—once to convince a pretty boy to put on the manacle, another to convince an unpretty boy I was *just another stupid cunt* & not worth it—

That last night at that last bar was when I saw the news report on TV—

The more I watched, the more I sobered to it all, all of it, the boys meant nothing anymore—I saw what she had, what she wanted—

They said he was a preacher who'd gone from the Bible belt circuit to the jungles of Peru & then come back after years gone—they showed a video of him, footage from a cell phone, snuck out of one of his recent preachings

Talking softly, no microphone, we at the bar listening could hear him say, *“There is violence in the human heart & there is tenderness. What I have learned is that God wants us to crush both of these for him—*

"Was it you? Will it be?"

"Genny."

"The girl? The hotel room? The cops? Was that you before we met?"

"Does it matter?"

"Tell me."

"No."

"But?"

"But what."

*"But?"*

"I knew him."

"How?"

"Genny."

"No. Fucking tell me."

"He came back with a message, some facts, maybe a plan. I'm not sure."

"And."

"Genny."

"And?"

"He met the girl. She was convinced."

"Of."

"She'd dreamed him. And he thought that he was her dream. He thought he saw her face in the jungle, deep in it, where there was nobody. He wasn't coming back until he saw her face. And then he took all he knew, all he'd learned, knowing it would go wrong, & went to her, found her, convinced he was her dream, she had dreamed him. And she believed that she'd dreamed him."

"How did you know him?"

"I was involved."

"You convinced her."

"Yes."

"She'd dreamed you."

"I taught her how."

"So why?"

"I mistook her. At some point I had primed her too much, too far, I couldn't undo it."

"Undo what? What did you want her for?"

"To go with me."

"Where?"

"To Dreamland."

"Why?"

"I was wrong. About all of it."

"How?"

"It was you, Genny. I want you to come with me."

There was more than Preacher knew, he'd led them to each other & then let go of them completely, so much that they probably remembered him as no more than a shadow—he hadn't known what happened next, & after, & how they would encounter each other again—

tell—

*She loved when the moon was nearly full, but not quite. Now we're the same, she smiled, nearly full tonight, soon he would come & they would go together—*

*She left her window open & the crimson curtains drawn so she could dance as she wished & willed—clearing the room of its debris—lacy things & trinkets, there was nothing but tonight & the rest a mask, no longer needed for others—*

*She moved slowly across her floor, more & more heated by the nearly full moonlight, & she knew he watched, as she had long watched, & he was coming nearer all the time, she would dance for him & they would know a moment, her cries were an animal's that night until she passed out, & finally dreamed the face Preacher showed her—*

*He knew something was wrong as they drove to the motel room—but he wasn't sure—her scent was off, only one sniff had told him & he'd taken no more, they were going tonight but that sniff—*

*She came out of the bathroom in only a slip—pink, her beauty plainly displayed, strawberry blonde hair, green eyes, slender, luscious & untouched, that sniff had told him everything yet here she was—*

*She'd worn little more in the audience that night, I'd known her immediately—*

*She did not flinch as the rest did—*

*“Violence & tenderness  
Violence & tenderness  
Violence & tenderness!  
Violence & tenderness!  
Violence & tenderness!  
Violence & tenderness!*

*“God want us to crush both of these for him, wants us to relinquish ourselves, our wills, whatever defiant hangs by our bones—*

*“No! I do no longer! My last night of this! Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you!”*

*We left quickly, & my sniff was accidental, first minute in the car. Oh shit. He drove, & lightly held her hand & knew this was off, wrong—*

*We sit on the bed. I touch her cheek. She breathes harder. No. “If it could have been anyone but you.” I know now. He fooled you. I'm **not him**.*

*She saw the gun on the bedside table. Flinched. Flinched so deep within I barely caught it. I did.*

*But she couldn't let it go.*



*She took my hand, closing her eyes, brought it to her breast, lips parting, cupped her breast with me. I let, a moment, two, then pulled it back roughly.*

*"No."*

*"But."*

*"They're coming."*

*"Who?"*

*"You'll have a choice."*

*"Who?"*

*"If you choose to wait, we'll go together."*

*Sirens. TV cameras. She panics, this isn't. He won't. That gun. His hand.*

*"Do you know what I learned in the jungles? Do you?"*

*"Learned."*

*"Life & death. I saw worlds without end. I walked & flew & dreamed until I disbelieved in nothing."*

*"Nothing!" He points to the door. She hears the gun being moved around, but nothing happens as she walks through the door to spotlights & pointed revolvers.*

*She chose to wait, Preacher. You don't know this. She kept the clothes she wore that night, & the night gown, in a pink suitcase, & she waited until he was free, & then she went to him, Preacher, & her claim this time was not refused, it was true-eyed & she was his own, & they went together, Preacher, they go together.*

*"There will be a room first. You can ask. I will answer."*

*"A room."*

*"A room in a hotel. Walls of fire, ceiling of stars, floor of moonlight. Couch of silver melody. Bed of blue light & red gold."*

*"You're reciting that. Why are you reciting? You never recite anything!"*

*He nods. "You remained with me. You are the last."*

*"I'm the most stubborn."*

*He nearly laughs. "I can show you there. That's what I wish to do. Show you. Finally."*

*"Why me & not her?"*

*"We'll go now."*



*To be continued in Cenacle | 83 | December 2012*

\* \* \* \* \*

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*Timothy Leary*



# The Concord Prison Psychedelic Experiment

[Essay]

*(Excerpt from Flashbacks: A Personal and Cultural History of an Era, 1983)*

*March 1961  
Harvard University*

By spring we had given psychedelic drugs to over 200 subjects and had learned a lot about how to run sessions. Eighty-five percent of our subjects were reporting that the experience was the most educational of their lives. These testimonials were pleasing because most therapies, including psychoanalysis, traditionally reported around thirty-three percent positive change.

As scientists we were still dissatisfied. We were faced with the unavoidable problem in the field of psychiatry. How do you demonstrate that someone has improved? Self-appraisals are an important index but inconclusive; heroin addicts and born-again Christians claim to feel better but others might disagree. There didn't seem to be an objective way to keep score on life changes. Half of the people coached might have loosened up and half might have gotten their lives more tightly organized, and for any or all of them the changes might have been a genuine improvement. Half might have increased the intimacy and closeness of their marriages, and half might have left their spouses. Some might have benefited by making more money, some by making less. We needed clear statistical indices, like batting averages, for the game of life.

About this time a call came from two officials of the Massachusetts prison system, requesting that Harvard graduate-interns be assigned for research and training. They expected a quick turn-down. Just as prison guards were the bottom of the law-enforcement hierarchy, prison work was at that time the pits of psychology. Criminals simply didn't change.

Much to their surprise I invited the prison officials over for lunch at the Faculty Club. I welcomed the chance to get into a prison and initiate a volunteer rehabilitation program. I had two purposes in mind. First, if we could change the behavior of violent criminals with our drugs, we'd demonstrate that our methods and theories worked where nothing else did. Second, prison rehabilitation would provide us with the behavioral scientist's dream, an iron-clad objective index of improvement—the recidivism rate.

The return-rate in Massachusetts prisons was running seventy percent. I felt we could decimate that percentage. What a boon to society—converting violent criminals to law-abiding citizens! If we could teach the most unregenerate how to wash their own brains, then it would be a cinch to coach non-criminals to change their lives for the better.

A deal was made over lunch. I agreed to send Harvard graduate-interns into the prisons; the officials agreed to get clearances from the wardens and correctional psychiatrists for us to give drugs to convicts.

A week later I drove out to the prison. I wore my Ivy League tweed uniform. I even wore leather shoes for this occasion. Warden Tom Grennan, a fellow Irishman, was impressed and pleased. A Harvard psychologist had never come around before.

Next I had to get the approval of the prison psychiatrist. This could have meant trouble. Shrinks didn't usually like programs of head expansion, and medics liked to preserve their monopoly on drugs.

I walked nervously down the hallway to the metal cage that opened into a prison cellblock. Rang a bell. A slot opened. A guard looked out, nodded, and opened up a second metal door. I walked through the prison with a sense of foreboding. And precapitulation. I'd been here before and I'd be here again.

### *Concord State Prison*

I walked through the first tall cellblock, across the prison yard to the hospital. Bell, peephole, metal hinges creaking. Entered the hospital. Knocked on the door of the prison psychiatrist. It opened and facing me was good news. The prison psychiatrist was black and definitely avant-garde. Hurray! Philosopher Thomas Kuhn said that when you wish to introduce change-technology to a culture, you'll find your best allies among the outsiders, those whose alienation from the establishment makes them more open to change.

Aside from being a black psychiatrist, Dr. Jefferson Monroe [Madison Presnell] stood out in the primitive period of 1961 as another kind of rarity—a sophisticated psychiatrist. Impeccable, graceful, hip. He had a twinkle in his eye and a wise, cool way of looking at you. He was definitely ready for something new.

A few days later Dr. Monroe paid a return call at the Faculty Club and then came to a staff meeting at the Center. We put him on the Harvard payroll as a consultant. The following Sunday he brought his wife over for cocktails.

"Your plan to teach prisoners to brainwash themselves is simply delicious. There's even a slight chance you can pull it off. Do you know what that might mean?"

"A great boon to society," I suggested.

Dr. Monroe crossed his legs gracefully and laughed. "My dear, you don't really understand what you're getting into, do you? Sooner or later you're going to discover that law enforcement people and prison administrators have no desire to cut crime. They want more crime and more money to fight it. I'll cover you from the medical and psychiatric end, but sooner or later, if your methods work they'll start coming down on you. Reporters, bureaucrats, officials. 'Harvard Gives Drugs to Prisoners.' And you're going to have to do the impossible. Cure prisoners with your left hand while you try to hold off the entire bureaucracy with your right."

"So what? If it works."

"Being human, sooner or later you'll make a teeny little mistake. One of your subjects will revert. 'Harvard Drug Parolee Robs Bank.'"

"As long as we do everything out front, no secrets," I said, "we can make a few honest mistakes."

“Maybe,” said Monroe. “Look, here’s the deal. I’ll back you all-out, until you goof. When they start coming down on you, exactly at that point I’ll have to protect my own pretty black ass. ‘Cause, I’m not you. I’m not the new Freud. So I’ll win with you, but I can’t afford to lose with you.”

On that basis we agreed on a plan: Monroe would line up volunteers in the prison population for the drug project and I’d line up Harvard graduate students willing to put their nervous systems on the line taking drugs with maximum security prisoners.

A few days later I was visited by a graduate student named Ralph Metzner. Metzner had a reputation for being one of the most rigorously experimental students in the department. He wanted to work on the prison project.

My first reaction was that Metzner was too academic, too dainty-British, too ivory tower to walk into a prison and take drugs with hoodlums. But Metzner said he wanted to learn how. So I guided a training session for Metzner, his girlfriend, Dr. Monroe and his wife, and graduate student Gunther Weil and his wife. This was the fifty-second time I had taken psilocybin.

My study was the site of this experiment. Since this was an exploratory training session, I told the participants to relax, have a good time, and learn what they could. After a few hours of silent serenity, Jefferson took over spontaneously as guide. His joking and warm earthiness created a benign atmosphere. Ralph turned out to be a natural inner explorer.

A few days later Ralph, Gunther, and I, feeling a sense of camaraderie as a result of the session, drove out to the Concord prison to meet the six candidates Jefferson had selected from the pool of volunteers. Two murderers. Two armed robbers. One embezzler. One black heroin pusher.

In a dreary hospital room—gray walls, black asphalt floor, barred windows—we told the six suspicious men about an experience that could change their lives. We brought books for them to read, reports by other subjects, articles that described the ecstasies as well as the possible terrors. We spent most of the time describing our own experiences and answering questions. We made it clear to the prisoners that this was nothing we were doing to them. There was no doctor-patient game going here. We would take the drugs along with them. We were doing nothing to them that we weren’t happily doing to ourselves.

We also made a transactional research contract with the prisoners. We said something like this: “We want to find out how and how much you change during this experience. For this reason we want you to take a battery of psychological tests before you eat the mushroom pills. After three or four sessions we’ll give you the tests again. After you’ve taken the post-tests, we’ll go over the results with you. Nothing in this project is going to be a secret.” To the bored prisoners this sounded like a good deal, so the following week each was administered a complicated battery of psychological tests.

The prison project extended our research into a number of new areas. We were dealing with a very different population from the professionals and high-status subjects in the early research. Second, we were switching from questionnaires and subjective reports to objective measurements of personality change. And third, we had to move from naturalistic settings to the most controlled and least inspirational environment imaginable—the hospital of a maximum security prison.

Six prisoners and three Harvard psychologists met for the first drug session. During the morning I was to turn on with three convicts. The three other prisoners and the two graduate



students would act as observers. Then in the afternoon Gunther and Ralph and the three observing prisoners would take the drug, and the first group would act as guides. We brought a record player, tape recorder, and several books of classical art with us. Otherwise the room was bleak: four beds, a large table, and a few chairs. The bowl of pills was placed in the center of the table. To establish trust I was the first to ingest. Then the bowl was passed among the three prisoners, who each took twenty milligrams. After a half hour the effect started coming on: the loosening of thought, the humming pressure in my head, the sharp, brilliant, and then brutal intensification of the senses.

I felt terrible.

What a place to be—locked in a penitentiary, out of light, out of mind. I turned my brain towards the man next to me, a Polish bank robber from Worcester. I could see him much too clearly, every pore in his face, every blemish, the hairs in his nose, the horrid green-yellow enamel of his decaying teeth, the glistening of his frightened eyes, every hair on his head looking big as a tree-branch. What am I doing here?

“How ya doing, John?” I asked with a weak grin.

“I feel fine,” he answered, but I didn’t believe him.

“How you doing, Doc?”

I was about to reply in a reassuring professional tone, but I couldn’t. It’s hard to lie when you’re in the power of the mushrooms. “I feel lousy.”

John drew back his purple-pink lips. “What’s the matter, Doc?”

Inside his eyes I could see a yellow spider-web of retinal fibers, optical veins shiny and pulsing. “I’m afraid of you,” I said.

John’s eyes enlarged, and then he began to laugh. I could see in his mouth, swollen red tissues, gums, tongue, throat. I was ready to be swallowed.

“Well, that’s funny, Doc, ‘cause I’m afraid of you.”

We were both smiling at this point, leaning forward.

“Why are you afraid of me?”

“Because you’re a criminal. Why are you afraid of me?”

“I’m afraid of you ‘cause you’re a fucking mad scientist.”

Then our eyes locked and we both laughed.

Voila. There it was. We had made a connection. The sun came out in the room. For a while.

One of the prisoners, the heroin pusher, moaned and tossed on his cot.

“Are you all right, Willy?” I asked, apprehensive about a potential threat to our newfound sense of security. Everyone in the room watched, anxiously wondering if the prison setting was just irretrievably wrong, if this was to be one of those dreaded “bad trips.”

Willy lifted his head and gave a big grin. “Man, am I all right? I’m in heaven looking down on this funny little planet and I’m a million years old and there’s a million things to enjoy—and it’s all happening in prison. And you ask me, man, am I all right?”

When Willy laughed, we were all high and happy.

Jefferson checked in every now and then, walked around the room like a dainty, graceful cat not saying much but taking it all in.

At six o’clock, as the afternoon session was winding down, there was a bang on the door, and the guards came in. “Time is up, men. Back to the ward.” Ralph, Gunther, and I went with the six prisoners back to the lockup part of the hospital, where we smoked and



laughed and compared notes on what we'd seen and where we'd been.

Then it was time for us to go. We shook hands and promised to return the next day for a follow-up. Ralph, Gunther, and I walked out of the hospital, across the dark prison yard, rang the bell, and waited until the iron doors opened into the guardroom. We went through two metal doors, down metal stairs, past the clanking steaming radiators, and outside the prison.

We laughed in triumph. All of us, Harvardites and convicts, had passed a crucial test. We had put our faith in human nature and the drug experience on the line. A bit of pagan magic had occurred, and none of us would ever forget that brief day of grace. It was a heroic moment in our lives.

The morning after the session, driving back to the prison was like returning to some comfortable place in my skull. Strong bonds of empathy had developed. We had been through the adventure together. We had gone beyond the roles of Harvard psychologist and convict, faced fear together, had trusted and laughed.

This time I felt at home in the prison. It always works this way after a good trip. Your old reality fades a bit, and you incorporate a new reality. This identification is not metaphorical. It is neurological. In scientific papers we called this process re-imprinting.

This first session changed our status in the prison. As word went out through the grapevine, prisoners approached us in the yard to ask if they could sign up for the project. Guards and parole officers stopped us to request that a favorite prisoner be admitted to the group.

We spent the next two weeks discussing the prisoners' reactions. Then we ran a second session for the group. This time the prisoners were more sophisticated. There was no sitting around on chairs in nervous anticipation. As soon as the energy began to radiate through their bodies, they headed for the cots and closed their eyes. For the next two or three hours they lay engulfed in the visions, occasionally sitting up to smile or make some quiet comment.

After the third session the convicts repeated the personality tests to measure changes. We brought the test results into the hospital room and handed them to the inmates. No secrets. We explained what the tests measure and what the results meant.

They had changed on the objective indices so dear to the heart of the psychologist. They showed less depression, hostility, anti-social tendencies; more energy, responsibility, cooperation. Their personality scores had swung dramatically and significantly in the direction of improved mental health.

By handing over and explaining their test results we were training the prisoners in psychodiagnostics. The prisoners were becoming their own psychologists. They loved it. There were fierce discussions about personality characteristics as the cons played the psychiatric game.

We planned the next phase of the research. The convicts were to select new recruits for the group. They would learn how to administer the psychological tests. They would give the orientation lectures. They would take over the project.

The prison became a training center. New graduate students were assigned to experienced inmates for orientation and guidance. In session after session the inmates guided the Harvards, and the Harvards guided the convicts.

The energy generated by the sessions was felt beyond the prison walls. The penitentiary session room became a showplace. Whenever visitors came to Cambridge inquiring about psychedelic drugs, we took them out to the prison. The convicts spoke about their mystical experiences to Gerald Heard, Alan Watts, and William Burroughs, Aldous Huxley, and the

ex-king of Sarawak, as well as to coveys of visiting psychiatrists. Our strategy here was to do everything possible to enhance their pride and sense of accomplishment. Every power we could turn over to the convicts became a fiber in the body of self-esteem.

By fall 1962 we had over thirty-five convicts and fifteen Harvards in the group. The men started being paroled at the rate of two and three a month, so we started Project CONTACT. The ex-cons and the Harvards were paired up in buddy-system teams, with the Harvards visiting the ex-cons in their homes. There was a twenty-four-hour telephone to rush help in case of emergencies.

We sobered them up, praised them to the parole officers, cooled out angry bosses. In short we did what a family does for its confused members. We kept them out of jail.

Soon our circus had grown into a three-ring extravaganza. There was the in-prison group. There was the outside CONTACT project. And there was the equally important task of keeping the state administrators and officials happy. We sent out a steady flow of memoranda and progress reports to the myriad departments that had a jealous interest in the work of rehabilitating criminals. Following Jefferson's sage advice we never let a week go by without contacting the bureaucrats, making them a part of the action.

One morning in the second year of the project I came into Warden Grennan's office to report the most recent statistics. We had kept ninety percent of our convicts out of jail.

He listened politely but kept glancing behind me. When I finished, he clapped me on the back and led me to the corner. "Look at that, Timmy," he said proudly.

It was an architect's color drawing of a super-prison. "Look. Two football fields. This wing is for admitting and orientation. Two more cell blocks. Mess halls double in size. We'll have capacity for twice as many inmates, and we can double the staff all the way down the line."

His face was glowing. This was his fantasy coming true. A huge prison and an organizational table twice as big to go with it! Bureaucrat Heaven.

"That's wonderful, Bill," I said. "But have you forgotten? You're not going to need a larger prison."

His face registered surprise.

"Why not?"

"Because we're cutting your return-rate from seventy percent to ten percent. If you let us continue our project, you won't need half the cells you have right now."

The warden laughed, in spite of himself. "I can't argue with you, Timmy. You have kept these men straight, although I'll be damned if I know how you did it."

We were trying to figure this out ourselves. It seemed that two major factors were bringing about changes in the convicts: first, the perception of new realities helped them recognize that they had alternatives beyond the cops and robbers game; then, the empathetic bonding of group members helped them sustain their choice of a new life.

Similar kinds of sudden behavior change had been observed in other species. Conrad Lorenz, the German ethologist, and Nico Tinbergen, the Dutch naturalist, were the first to describe imprinting, a form of permanent learning assimilated in one shot, as opposed to step-by-step, painstaking and often painful, punishment-reward conditioning, which traditional psychologists and educators believed to be the basis of change. Lorenz discovered the imprinting phenomenon one day when goose eggs hatched in an incubator in his laboratory. In the absence of the mother the goslings followed him around, apparently because he was the

only warm moving object on the scene. The baby birds continued to focus on him, ignoring their mother when she was brought to them.

Hundreds of experiments by Lorenz and others have demonstrated that this immediate learning, which requires no reward or punishment, occurs only during a critical period, shortly after birth or metamorphoses. During this critical period the organism, rather than acquiring behavior from the environment, hooks up an innate behavior pattern to the environment. The nervous systems of mammals and fowl respond to the first available stimulus, usually the mother, activating and binding instinctual behavior. Birds, for example, have been known to seek mothering from ping pong balls. Baby giraffes have imprinted the jeep of the hunter who shot the mother.

Psychologists were at first reluctant to apply the imprinting principle to human behavior, probably because of the challenge it posed to our notion of free will. However, the dramatic changes in behavior that followed our prison experiments seemed to be best explained by these concepts. The drugs appeared to suspend previous imprints of reality (in this case, the prison mentality), inducing a critical period during which new imprints could be made.

People tended to form powerful positive attachments to those present during a trip, sometimes following one another around like Lorenz's goslings. It was also true that I was becoming attached to those present during my sessions.

Even more important than the bonding was the re-imprinting of new belief systems and attitudes about others and society that occurred during the sessions. In a positive, supportive environment, new non-criminal realities were being imprinted. (And in some weird and ominous way, I may have been re-imprinting a prison mentality, a reality which I was forced to inhabit between 1970 and 1976.)

Everything that I have learned in the subsequent twenty years of drug research has strengthened my conviction that psychedelic re-imprinting ranks with DNA deciphering as one of the most significant discoveries of the century.

Unfortunately the subsequent controversy about drugs overshadowed scientific implications of this experiment. Though we had dramatically cut the crime rate, teaching prisoners to clear their own brains of old programs and create new ones, the prison project was shut down after Alpert and I were driven from Harvard. Our ex-cons formed their own group, with the help of our colleague Professor Walter Houston Clark. They continued to operate the Self-Help program for fifteen years on their own.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Notes on Contributors

**Ric Amante** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry frequently appears in the pages of this journal. He recently married his beloved, & seems a happier man for this, & for many other things.

**Jorge Luis Borges** was born in 1899 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, & died in 1986 in Geneva, Switzerland. He was a world-class short story writer, known especially for his works *Ficciones* & *The Aleph*. His story in this issue was also reprinted in the 2005 Burning Man Books series.

**Joe Coleman** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poem in the current issue is a requested sequel to his poem “Dolores Toodle Goes to Market,” published in *Cenacle* | 81 | June 2012.

**Judh Haggai** lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. More of her work can be found at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>. Her haiku poetry gets better, funnier, & happily stranger over time.

**Nathan D. Horowitz** lives in Vienna, Austria. His journal entry in this issue is from a longer work-in-progress. More of his writing & music can be found at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com>.

**Dr. Timothy Leary** was born in 1920 in Springfield, Massachusetts, & died in 1996 in Los Angeles, California. Dr. Leary was many things to many people, but one good read of the excerpt from his autobiography in this issue will show you the best of the man, in just a few pages.

**Martina Newberry** lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her next published book of poetry will be *Where It Goes*, out sometime in 2013. More of her work can be found at: <http://rollwiththechanges.org>.

**Tom Sheehan** lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His excellent story in the current issue is his first prose contribution.

**Kassandra Soulard** lives in Arlington, Massachusetts, & will wear a strange white wig & shiny nails for the Jellicle Guild Halloween party tonight. Strange, delightful girl.

**Raymond Soulard, Jr.** lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. I found work this summer, good work, & now my task is to spread my renewed hope & good fortune as far & wide as I can. I'll be Captain Kirk at the party tonight!

\* \* \* \* \*





Surely all people were made for each other  
To join in together when the days turn to dust  
So let the prison walls crumble  
And the borders all tumble  
There's a place for us all here  
And ain't it enough?

--Old Crow Medicine Show, 2012.

